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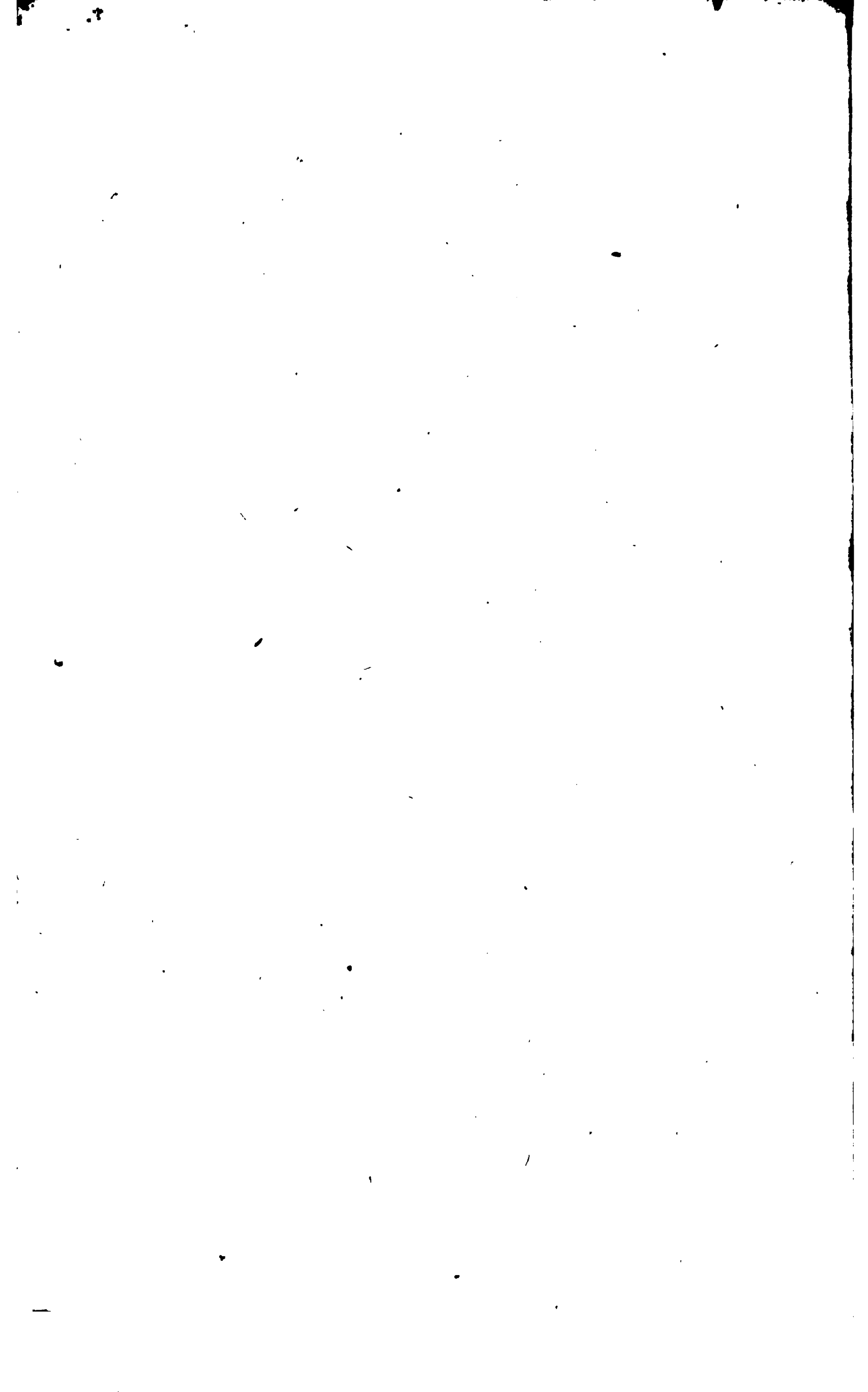
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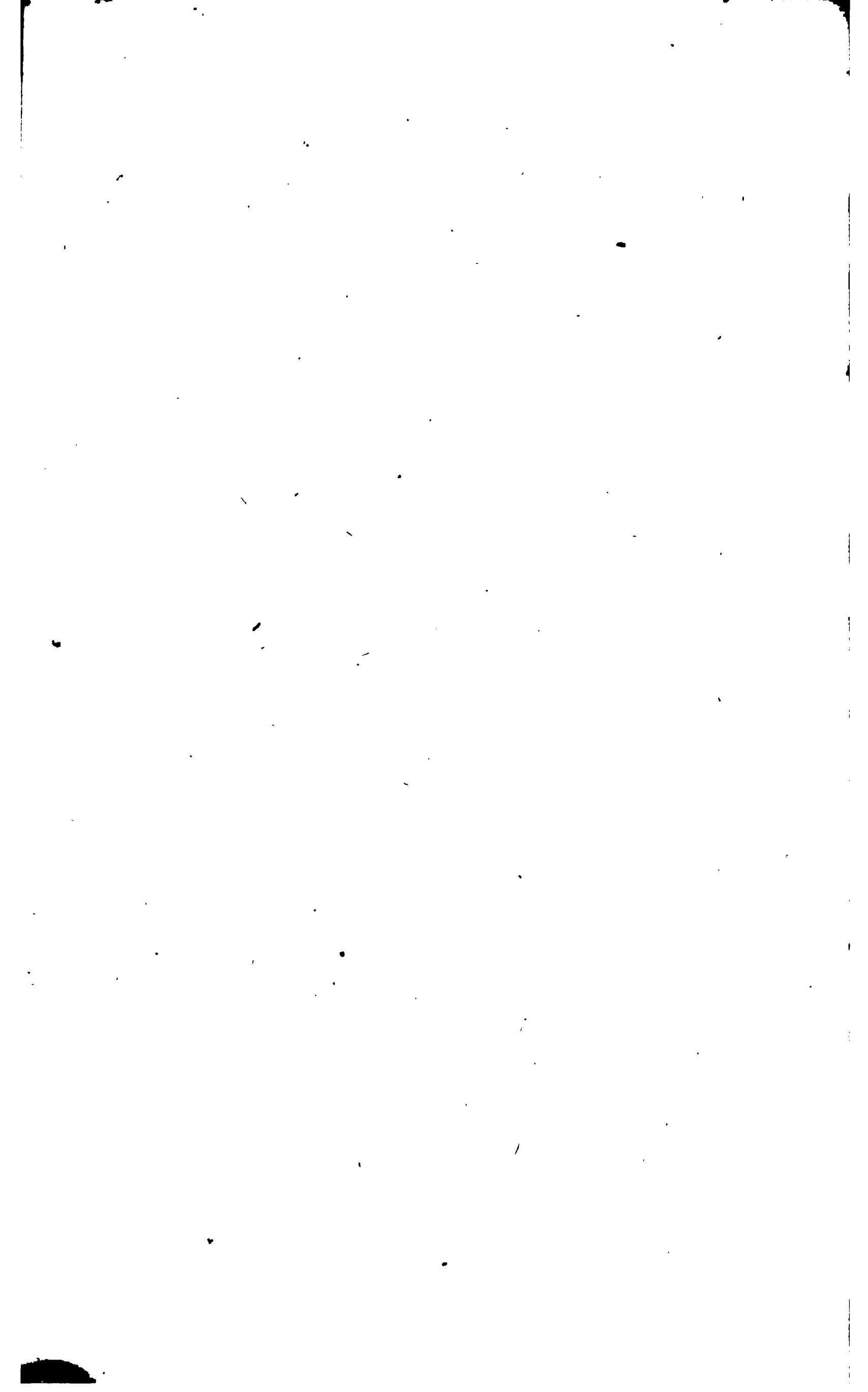


**THOUGHTS**  
**ON**  
**THE IMPORTANCE**  
**OF THE**  
***MANNERS OF THE GREAT***  
**TO**  
**GENERAL SOCIETY.**

---

**" You are the Makers of Manners."**

**SHAKESPEARE.**



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G. SIDNEY, Printer,  
Northumberland Street, Strand.

**THOUGHTS**

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TO

**GENERAL SOCIETY.**

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AND AN ESTIMATE

**OF THE RELIGION**

OF THE

**FASHIONABLE WORLD.**

BY HANNAH MORE.

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**A NEW EDITION.**

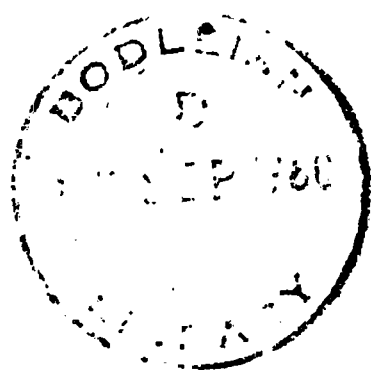
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1809.



# PREFACE.

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It has often occurred to the Author, that it would furnish a fair subject for discussion, to determine whether it argues more vanity when a writer prefixes his name to his book, or when he publishes without it;—whether it implies more self-sufficiency to suppose that his name is of so much value as to attract readers to his work, or to trust so confidently to the merit of the

work itself, as to depend on its unassisted strength for making its own way.—In short, whether the presumption be greater in thinking better of himself, or of his book; and how the proportion of good opinion can be settled or separated.

This is a dilemma in which the writer of these pages has not seldom been involved, having not unfrequently indulged her vanity, or her humility, whichever it may be called, under both shapes, without being able to ascertain on which side the real difference lies. Nor can she decide which principle predominated in risking these two little



works anonymously, near twenty years ago, or in afterwards publishing them, with a name which she had little right to expect could confer importance on any performance.

There is, however, one decided advantage which belongs to the anonymous writer. He is not restrained from the strongest reprehension, and most pointed censure, of existing errors, by the conscious apprehension that his own faults may be brought forward. He is under no fear that his negligences will be opposed to his reproofs. He is not deterred from expatiating on the deficiencies of others, by the fear that

the reader may confront his life with his arguments.

Being now called upon by her Booksellers to unite these separate pieces into one volume, the Author cannot neglect so fair an occasion of expressing her gratitude for the very favourable reception which they severally experienced in their unacknowledged state, seven large editions of the first of these pieces having been called for in the course of a few months, and the whole third impression having been sold on the morning it was published, serve, among repeated instances of general favour, to increase her regret that the

merit of her writings have not borne more proportion to the indulgence with which they have been received,

May she venture to observe, without incurring the charge of over-rating her slight performances, that there is a point of view in which this success reflects no discredit on the public opinion? For, does it not evince that where the obvious aim of a writer is to promote the interests of Christian morals, the effort, however feeble, will be candidly accepted; nor will the deficiencies of the composition be allowed to defeat the honesty of the intention.

The lapse of years since the first

appearance of these two small pieces, has only served to strengthen the conviction that such topics as they embrace, cannot be pressed too closely, or too frequently, though they may be pressed far more ably, on the attention of the great and the gay,—on the consciences of the busy and the opulent.

The awful and unparalleled public events which have occurred since these “Thoughts on the Manners of the Great,” “and this Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable,” were first addressed to them, seem to furnish no new reason why the standard of Religion which these Tracts presumed to hold up should be lowered, while the strictness of practice

which they ventured to suggest, should be relaxed. Have we beheld any such additional instances of the stability of greatness, as teach us that it is become more safe than formerly to build on the certainty of earthly prosperity? Have we seen any such new evidences of the permanency of human grandeur, as to induce us, by any fresh conviction of its security, to an increased neglect of the things which are eternal?

So far from it, will even the most careless observer refuse to acknowledge, that if ever there was a period in which the demand for elevating the tone of

Christianity, principle, and correct conduct was more imperious than another, that period is the present ?

If this country, which God has signally distinguished, by preserving it from the almost universal wreck of Empire—which God has signally honoured by rendering it the exclusive Asylum for the persecuted, the plundered, and the destitute, of all Europe, the sole refuge of a distracted world ;—if this country has been singled out from among the nations of the earth, by such pre-eminent favour, should not such a country be anxiously desirous to render itself more worthy of its high destination, in having been preserved.

itself, and appointed the preserver of others? As it would on the one hand be unreasonable to plead our trials and difficulties as apology for relaxing our moral discipline, it would be unfair in the other, to produce it as a motive for diminishing our gratitude. Are we not then loudly called upon to acknowledge the mercy of these providential distinctions, by exhibiting in our improved practice *that* consistency which is the life and spirit, as well as the criterion of real goodness.

While England is establishing a splendid reputation abroad, by every act of wise and vigorous resistance to

the oppressor of mankind, and by every instance of disinterested liberality to the oppressed, should she not be equally anxious to establish a solid glory at home, by sedulously labouring to raise the depressed tone of virtuous practice? Should she not be jealous to evince, that her unexampled generosity to strangers is stimulated by the only pure and noble principle of action? And will not this be most unequivocally demonstrated by the only infallible test, a proportionable attention to domestic religion?

While Great Britain is exhibiting a glorious energy in the cause of a nation,



brave and generous like herself, yet professing an erroneous worship, let her convince that nation that she is actuated in assisting her, by the spirit of a religion that is indeed *reformed* ; a religion which having the love of God for its motive, has consequently for its end, charity to mankind without distinction of country or of religion.

We are become conspicuous like a city set on a hill. We are “ the observed of all observers.” While the eyes of the whole world are fixed upon us, let the whole world perceive that our active services, our warm benevolence to our suffering fellow-creatures, flow from the

only principle which can sanctify right conduct, from the only source which can recommend it to the favour of God. Let us prove to them that the religion of the reformation is not a mere term, a nominal distinction, but an improved practical principle, discovering its superiority by its effects. Let us not let slip the present sublime occasion of illustrating the faith which we profess, by a conduct not derogatory to that high profession.

While we cannot too highly value ourselves on being Britons, let us never forget that we must not rest in it as a

mere local distinction.—While we justly triumph in our unparalleled constitution, let us remember that it is not a mere political distinction, glorious as that is, which must finally save us. Let us be persuaded that the paramount superiority of our happy country will consist in acting up to the spirit of that religion which it professes.—That it is not enough that its spirit is transfused into our laws—it is not enough even that it is taught in its public worship, and secured in its invaluable establishment, but that, if it would operate effectually, it must operate individually; if it would operate on the people, it must

operate on their superiors, it must be received into the heart, and exhibited in the life of the rich and the great. By adopting this measure, and only by adopting it, can Christianity be rescued from the anomaly with which its enemies have stigmatized it, that the practice of Christians does not more uniformly exemplify the doctrines of its Author.

Thanks to the English spirit, we want at this moment of peril, no Tyrtæus to awake our valour, for it never slumbers. But we want "the warning voice of him who saw the Apocalypse" to rouse

us from our *moral* slumber. We want not to be stimulated to public spirit, but to individual virtue : not to exertion for others, but to vigilance over ourselves ; —not to generosity, but to self-denial, not to patriotism, but to piety.



**THOUGHTS**  
**ON THE**  
***MANNERS OF THE GREAT.***

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To a large and honourable class of the community, to persons considerable in reputation, important by their condition in life, and commendable for the decency of their general conduct, these slight hints are respectfully addressed. They are not intended as a satire upon vice, or a ridicule upon folly, being written neither for the foolish nor the vicious. The subject is too serious for ridicule; and those to whom it is addressed are too respectable for satire. It is recommended to the consideration of those who, filling the higher ranks in life,

are naturally regarded as patterns, by which the manners of the rest of the world are to be fashioned.

The mass of mankind, in most places, and especially in those conditions of life which exempt them from the temptation to shameful vices, is, perhaps, chiefly composed of what is commonly termed, by the courtesy of the world, *good kind of people*; for persons of very flagitious wickedness are almost as rare as those of very eminent piety. To the latter of these, admonition were impertinent; to the former it were superfluous. These remarks, therefore, are principally written with a view to those persons of rank and fortune who live within the restraints of moral obligation, and acknowledge the truth of the Christian religion; and who, if in certain instances they allow themselves in practices not compatible with a strict profession of Christianity, seem to do it rather from habit and want of reflection, than either from disbelief of its doctrines, or contempt of its precepts.



Inconsideration, Fashion, and the World, are three confederates against Virtue, with whom even good kind of people often contrive to live on excellent terms: and the fair reputation which may be obtained by a complaisant conformity to the prevailing practice, and by mere decorum of manners, without a strict attention to religious principle, is a constant source of danger to the rich and great. There is something almost irresistibly seducing in the contagion of general example: hence the necessity of that vigilance, which it is the business of Christianity to quicken by incessant admonition, and which it is the business of the world to lay asleep by the perpetual opiates of ease and pleasure.

A fair reputation is among the laudable objects of human ambition; yet even this really valuable blessing is sometimes converted into a snare, by inducing a treacherous security as soon as it is obtained; and by leading him who is too anxious about obtaining it, to stop short without aiming

at a higher motive of action. A fatal indolence is apt to creep in upon the soul when it has once acquired the good opinion of mankind, if the acquisition of that good opinion was the ultimate end of its endeavours. Pursuit is at an end when the object is in possession; for he is not likely to "press forward" who thinks he has already "attained." The love of worldly reputation, and the desire of God's favour, have this specific difference, that in the latter, the possession always augments the desire; and the spiritual mind accounts nothing done while any thing remains undone.

But after all, a fair fame, the support of numbers, and the flattering concurrence of human opinion, is obviously a deceitful dependance; for, as every individual must die for himself, and answer for himself, both these imaginary resources will fail, just at the moment when they could have been of any use. A good reputation, even without internal piety, would be

worth obtaining, if the tribunal of heaven were fashioned after the manner of human courts of judicature. If, at the general judgment, we were to be tried by a jury of our fellow mortals, it would be but common prudence to secure their favour at any price. But it can stand us in little stead in the great day of decision; it being the consummation of infinite goodness not to abandon us to the mercy of each other's sentence; but to reserve us for *his* final judgment, who knows every motive of every action; who will make strict inquisition into singleness of heart, and uprightness of intention; in whose eyes the sincere prayer of powerless benevolence will outweigh the most splendid profession, or the most dazzling action.

We cannot but rejoice in every degree of human virtue which operates favourably on society, whatever be the motive, or whoever be the actor; and we should gladly commend every degree of goodness, though it be not exactly squared by our own rules

and notions. Even the good actions of such persons as are too much actuated by a regard to appearances, are not without their beneficial effects. The righteousness of those who occupy this middle region of morality among us, certainly exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, for they are not only exact in ceremonials, but, in many respects, fulfil the weightier matters of law and conscience. Like Herod, they often "hear gladly," and "do many things." Yet I am afraid I shall be thought severe in remarking, that, in general, those characters in the New Testament, of whose future condition no very comfortable hope is given, seem to have been taken, not from the profligate, the abandoned, and the dishonourable; but from that decent class, commonly described by the term of *good sort of people*; that mixed kind of character in which virtue appears, if it do not predominate. The young Ruler was certainly one of the first of this order; and yet we are left in dark uncertainty as to his

final allotment. The rich man who built him barns and storehouses, and only proposed to himself the full enjoyment of that fortune, which we do not hear was unfairly acquired, might have been, for all that appears to the contrary, a *very good sort of man*; at least, if we may judge of him by multitudes who live precisely for the same purposes, and yet enjoy a good degree of credit, and who are rather considered as objects of respect, than of censure. His plan, like theirs, was “to take his ease, to eat, drink, and be merry.”

But the most alarming instance is that of the splendid epicure, who was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. He committed no enormities that have been transmitted to us; for that he dined well and dressed well, could hardly incur the bitter penalty of eternal misery. That his expences were suitable to his station, and his splendour proportioned to his opulence, does not exhibit any objection to his character. Nor are we told

that he refused the crumbs which Lazarus solicited. And yet this man, on an authority which we are not permitted to question, is represented, in a future state, as *lifting up his eyes being in torments*. His punishment seems to have been the consequence of an irreligious, a worldly, spirit; a heart corrupted by the softnesses and delights of life. It was not because he was rich, but because he trusted in riches; or, if even he was charitable, his charity wanted that principle which alone could sanctify it. His views terminated here; this world's good, and this world's applause, were the motives and the end of his actions. He forgot God; he was destitute of piety; and the absence of this great and first principle of human actions rendered his shining deeds, however they might be admired among men, of no value in the sight of God.

There is no error more common, or more dangerous, than the notion that an unrestrained indulgence of pleasure,

and an unbounded gratification of the appetites are generally attended with a liberal, humane, and merciful temper.—Nor is there any opinion more false and more fatal, or which demands to be more steadily controverted, than, that libertinism and good-nature are natural and necessary associates. For, after all that corrupt poets, and more corrupt philosophers, have told us of the blandishments of pleasure, and of its tendency to soften the temper, and humanize the affections, it is certain, that nothing hardens the heart like excessive and unbounded luxury; and he who refuses the fewest gratifications to his own voluptuousness, will generally be found the least susceptible of tenderness for the wants of others. In one reign, the cruelties at Rome bore an exact proportion to the dissoluteness at Capreæ. And, in another, it is not less notorious, that the imperial fiddler became more barbarous, as he grew more profligate. Prosperity, says the Arabian proverb, fills the

heart till it makes it hard; and the most dangerous pits and snares for human virtue, are those which are so covered over with the flowers of prosperous fortune, that it requires a cautious foot, and a vigilant eye, to escape them.

Ananias and Sapphira were, perhaps, well esteemed in society; for it was enough to establish a very considerable reputation to sell even part of their possessions for religious purposes: but what an alarm does it sound to hypocrisy, that, instead of being rewarded for what they brought, they were punished for what they kept back! And it is to be feared, that this deceitful pair are not the only one, upon whom a good action, without a pure intention, has drawn down a righteous retribution.

Outward actions are the surest, and, indeed, to human eyes, the only evidences of sincerity; but Christianity is a religion of *motives* and *principles*. The Gospel is continually referring to the *heart*, as the



source of good; it is to the poor in *spirit*, to the pure in *heart*, that the divine blessing is annexed.

A man may correct many improper practices, and refrain from many immoral actions, from merely human motives; but, though this partial amendment is not without its uses, yet this is only attacking symptoms, and neglecting the mortal disease. But, to subdue a worldly temper, to control irregular desires, and to have "a clean heart," is to attack sin in its strong holds. Totally to *accomplish* this, is, perhaps, beyond the narrow limits of human perfection, the best men being constantly humbled to find, that when they "would do good evil is present with them;" but to *attempt* it, with an humble reliance on superior aid, is so far from being an extravagant or romantic flight of virtue, that it is but the common duty of every ordinary Christian. And this perfection is not the less real, because it is a point which seems constantly to recede from our

approaches, just as the sensible horizon recedes from our natural eye. Our highest attainments, instead of bringing us, "to the mark," only teach us that the mark is at a greater distance, by giving us more humbling views of ourselves, and more exalted conceptions of the state, after which we are labouring. Though the progress towards perfection may be perpetual in this world, the actual attainment is reserved for a better. And this restless desire of a happiness which we cannot reach, and this lively idea of a perfection which we cannot attain, are among the many arguments for a future state, which seem to come little short of demonstration. The humble Christian takes refuge under the deep sense of his disappointments and defects, in this consoling hope, "When I awake up after thy likeness I shall be satisfied."

Let me not here be misunderstood as undervaluing the virtues which even worldly men may possess. Who is not

charmed with humanity, generosity, and integrity, in whomsoever they may be found? But one virtue must not intrench upon another. Charity must not supplant faith. If a man be generous, good-natured, and humane, it is impossible not to feel for him the tenderness of a brother; but if, at the same time, he be irreligious, intemperate, or profane, who shall dare to say he is in a safe state? Good humour, and generous sentiments, will always make a man a pleasant acquaintance; but who shall lower the doctrines of the Gospel, to accommodate them to the conduct of men? Who shall bend a strait rule, to favour a crooked practice? Who shall controvert that authority which has said, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord?*

May I venture to be a little paradoxical; and while so many grave persons are descanting on the mischiefs of vice, may I be permitted to say a word on the mischiefs of virtue, or, rather, of that shin-

ing counterfeit, which, while it wants the specific gravity, has much of the brightness of sterling worth? Never, perhaps, did any age produce more beautiful declamations in praise of virtue than the present; never were more polished periods rounded in honour of humanity. An antient Pagan would imagine that Astrea had returned to take up her abode in our metropolis; a primitive Christian would conclude, that "righteousness and peace" had there met together." But how would they be surprised to find that the obligation to these duties was not always thought binding, not only on the reader but on the eloquent encomiasts themselves! How would they be surprised to find that universal benevolence may subsist with partial injustice, and boundless liberality with sordid selfishness! that a man may seem eager in redressing the injuries of half the globe, without descending to the petty detail of private virtues; and burn with zeal for the good

of millions he never saw, while he is spreading vice and ruin through the little circle of his own personal influence!

When the general texture of an irregular life is spangled over with some constitutional pleasing qualities; when gaiety, good humour, and a thoughtless profusion of expence, throw a lustre round the faultiest characters, it is no wonder that common observers are blinded into admiration; a profuse generosity dazzles *them* more than the fulfilment of all the duties of the decalogue. But though it may be a very good electioneering virtue, and may promote the interests of the candidate more than the whole catalogue of evangelical graces; yet there are many qualities which may obtain popularity among men, who it do not tend to secure the favour of God. It is somewhat strange that the extravagance of the great should be the criterion of their goodness with those very people who are themselves the victims to this idol; for the prodigal

pays no debts if he can help it. And it is a notorious instance of the danger of these popular virtues, and of the false judgments of men, that, in one of the wittiest and most popular comedies\* which this country has ever produced, those very passages which exalt liberality, and turn justice into ridicule, were nightly applauded with enthusiastic rapture by those deluded tradesmen, whom, perhaps, that very sentiment helped to keep out of their money.

There is another sort of fashionable character, whose false brightness is still more pernicious, by casting a splendour over the most destructive vices. Corrupt manners, ruinous extravagance, and the most fatal passion for play, are sometimes gilded over with many engaging acts of charity, and a general attention and respect to the ceremonials of Religion. But this is degrading the venerable image and super-

\* The School for Scandal.

scription of Christianity, by stamping them on a baser metal than they were ever intended to impress. The young and gay shelter themselves under such examples, and scruple the less to adopt the bad parts of such mixed characters, when they see that a loose and negligent, not to say immoral conduct, is so compatible with a religious profession.

But I digress from my intention; for it is not the purpose of this address to take notice of any actions which the common consent of mankind has determined to be wrong : but of such chiefly as are practised by the sober, the decent, and the regular ; and to drop a few hints on such less obvious offences as are, in general,

Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne.

Nor will the bounds which I have prescribed myself allow of my wandering into a wide and general field of observation.

The idea of the present slight performance was suggested by reading the King's

late excellent proclamation against irreligion and immorality.\* Under the shelter of so high a sanction, it may not be unreasonable to press on the hearts of the better disposed, such observances as seem to be generally overlooked, and to remark such offences as commonly elude censure, because they are not commonly thought censurable.

It is obvious to all pious persons, that that branch of the divine law, against which the better kind of people trespass with the least scruple, is the fourth commandment. Many who would shudder at the violation of the other nine, seem without ceremony to expunge this from the divine code; but by what authority they do this, has never been explained. The Christian legislator does not seem to have abridged the commandments; and there is no subsequent

\* This Tract was written soon after the institution of the society for enforcing the King's proclamation against vice and irreligion.



authority so much as pretended to by Protestants.

It is not here intended to take notice of such flagrant offences as lie open to the cognizance of higher tribunals ; or to pollute this paper with descanting on the holders of card assemblies on Sundays ; the frequenters of taverns and gaming houses ; the printers of Sunday newspapers ; the proprietors of Sunday stage coaches ;\* and others who openly insult the laws of the lands ; laws which will always be held sacred by good subjects, even were not the law of God antecedent to them.

Many of the order whom I here address are persons of the tenderest humanity, and not only wish well to the interest of virtue, but are favourably disposed to advance the cause of religion ; nay, would be extremely

\* It is with deep concern that the Author is driven to remark the monstrous increase of these two evils since this Tract was published. The Sunday Newspapers have multiplied nearly in the proportion of one to twenty, and the stage coach drivers have lost all distinction of the day.

startled at not being thought sincerely religious; yet from inconsideration, want of time, want of self-examination, want of a just sense of the high requirements of the Divine law, want of suspecting the deceitfulness of the human heart, sometimes allow themselves in inattentions and negligences which materially affect their own safety, and the comfort of others.

While an animated spirit of charity seems to be kindled among us; while there is a general disposition to instruct the ignorant, and to reform the vicious; we cannot help regretting that these amiable exertions should be counteracted, in some degree, by practices of a directly opposite tendency; trifling in their appearance, but serious in their effects.

There are still among us petty domestic evils, which seem too inconsiderable to claim redress. There is an aggrieved body of men in our very capital, whose spiritual hardships seem scarcely to have been taken

into consideration,—I mean the **HAIR DRESSERS**, on whom

The Sunday shines, no day of rest to them.

Is there not a peculiar degree of unkindness in exercising such cruelty on the souls of men, whose whole lives are employed in embellishing our persons? And is it quite conceivable how a lady's conscience is able to make such nice distinctions, that she would be shocked at the idea of sending for her mantua-maker\* or milliner, her carpenter or mason, on a Sunday, while she makes no scruple regularly to employ a hair dresser?

Is it not almost ridiculous to observe the zeal we have for doing good at a distance, while we neglect the little, obvious, everyday, domestic duties, which should seem to solicit our immediate attention? But an action ever so right and praise-worthy which

\* It is feared that since these pages were written the scruple of sending for either is much diminishing.

is only to be periodically performed, at distant intervals, is less burthensome to corrupt nature, than an undeviating attention to such small, constant, right habits as are hostile to our natural indolence, and would be perpetually vexing and disturbing our self-love. The weak heart indulges its infirmity, by allowing itself intermediate omissions, and habitual neglects of duty ; reposing itself for safety, on regular but remote returns of stated performances. It is less troubled to subscribe to the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts, than to have daily prayers, in our own families ; and I am persuaded that there are multitudes of well-meaning people who would gladly contribute to a mission of Christianity to Japan or Otaheite, to whom it never occurred that the hair-dresser, whom they are every Sunday detaining from church, has a soul to be saved ; that the law of the land co-operates with the law of God, to forbid their employing him ; and that they have no right, either legal or moral, to this por-

tion of his time. The poor man himself, perhaps, dares not remonstrate, for fear he should be deprived of his employment for the rest of the week. If there were no other objection to a pleasurable Sunday among the great and affluent, methinks this single one might operate : would not a devout heart be unwilling to rob a fellow-creature of his time for devotion, or a humane one of his hour of rest ? “ Love “ worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore “ love is the fulfilling of the Law.”

It is strange that there should be so little consistency in human conduct, that the same persons should gladly contribute to spread the life of Christianity in another hemisphere ; while, by their example, they actually obstruct the progress of it at home. But it is, I doubt not, much oftner owing to the imperceptible influence of custom and habit, than to a decided ill attention. Besides, it may be in morals as it is in optics, the eye and the object may come too close to each other, to answer the end

of vision. There are certain faults which press too near our self-love to be even perceptible to us.

The petty mischief of what is called *card money*, is so assimilated to our habits, and interwoven with our family arrangements, that even many of the prudent and the virtuous no longer consider it as a worm which is feeding on the vitals of domestic virtue. How many poor youths, after having been trained in a wholesome dread of idleness and gaming, when they are sent abroad into the world, are astonished to find that part of the wages of the servant is to be paid by his furnishing the implements of diversion for the guests of the master. Thus good servants are a commodity which has long been diminishing by an elaborate system. The more sober the family, the fewer attractions it must necessarily have; for these servants will naturally quit a place, however excellent, where there is no play, for one where there is some; and a family where there is but little, for one where there

is much. Thus if the advantage of the dependant is to increase in a direct ratio to the dissipation of his employer, what encouragement is left for valuable servants, or what prospect remains of securing valuable servants for sober-minded families?

It will be said, that so small an evil is scarcely worth insisting on. But a small fault, which is become a part of a system, in time establishes an error into a principle. And that remonstrance which should induce people to abolish one wrong habit, or pluck out one rooted error, however trifling, would be of more real use than the most eloquent declamation against vice in general. To take out only one thorn from a suffering patient, is more beneficial to him than the most elaborate disquisition on the pain he is suffering from the thorns which remain.

It should be held as an eternal truth, that what is morally wrong can never be politically right. It would be arguing great ignorance of human nature, and exacting a very rigorous degree of virtue from a per-

son of vulgar sentiments to expect that he should wish well to the interests of sobriety, or heartily desire the decrease of dissipation, while the growth of it is made so profitable to himself. It is requiring too much to make the temptation so forcible where the power of resistance is so weak. To hold out to a poor fellow the strong seduction of interest, and yet to expect he will retain the same inflexible principle, is to expect, from an illiterate servant, an elevation of virtue, which has not always been found even in statesmen and ministers.

It is not here intended to enter into any animadversion on the subject of play itself. But may we not ask, without offence, if it be perfectly right to introduce any money arising from, or connected with it, into a part of regular family economy? Is it not giving an air of system to diversion, which does not seem entirely of a piece with the other orderly practices of many discreet families, where this odd traffic is carried on? Would not our ancestors,



who seem to have understood œconomy, and magnificence too, at least as well as their descendants, have been scandalized had it been proposed to them to incorporate play so intimately with the texture of their domestic arrangements, as that it should make part of their plan? And would they have thought it a very dignified practice not to have paid themselves for the amusements of their own houses; but to have invited their friends to an entertainment of which the guests were to defray part of the expence?

Let me suppose a case: what appearance would it have, if every gentleman who has partaken of the social entertainment of a friend's table, were, after dinner, expected, by the butler, to leave a piece of money under his plate to pay for his wine? Do not common sense, hospitality, friendship, and liberal feelings, revolt at the bare suggestion of such a project? Yet there is, in effect, as little hospitality, as little friendship, and as little liberality, in being obliged

to pay for the cards as for the wine; both equally making a part of the entertainment.

It is hardly too ludicrous to add, that, seeing how this point has been carried in favour of the groom of the chambers, (and it descends down to the lowest footman) we need not despair of seeing the butler insist on being allowed to furnish the wine, for which he shall compel the guests to pay, with the same high interest with which they now pay for the cards. It will seem odd at first, but afterwards we shall think no more about it, to see him, during dinner, noting down those who drink the more costly wines, that they may be taxed double. And it will sound whimsical *at first*, to hear the butler give his master notice, that he must quit his place, because the company have drank little wine. This only sounds ridiculous, while the leaving a place through deficiency of card money sounds reasonable, because we are accustomed to the

one, and the other is not yet become fashionable.

The extinction of this favorite perquisite would at first be considered as a violent innovation. All reformati<sup>o</sup>ns seem formidable before they are attempted. The custom of *vails*, “ which gave corruption “ *broader wings to fly*,” was supposed to be invincible. Yet how soon did a general concurrence exterminate it! Had any one foretold, twenty years ago, that in a very short space near half a million of pilfering, swearing, sabbath-breaking children, should be rescued from the streets, and brought into habits of sobriety and virtue, should we not have laughed to scorn the spiritual Hercules, who would have undertaken that the cleansing stream of religious instruction should thus be poured through the Augean stable of ignorance and vice, and in some measure wash away its grossest impurities?

The servant would probably complain of the annihilation of this gainful custom: but the master would find his account in

indemnifying the loss; for he in his turn would be released from the preposterous contribution to the wages of other men's servants. If in a family of overgrown dissipation the stated addition should not be found equivalent to the relinquished perquisite, the servant must heroically submit to the disadvantageous commutation for the public good. And after all it would be no very serious grievance if his reduced income should not then exceed that of the Chaplain. It will still at least exceed that of many a deserving gentleman, bred to liberal learning, whose feelings that learning has refined to a painful acuteness, and who is withering away in hopeless penury with a large family, on a Curacy, but little surpassing the wages of a livery servant.

The same principle in human nature by which the nabob, the contractor, and others, by a sudden influx of unaccustomed wealth, become voluptuous, extravagant, and insolent, seldom fails to produce the same effect on persons in these humbler

stations, when raised from inferior places to the sudden affluence of these gainful ones. Increased profligacy on a sudden swell of fortune is commonly followed by desperate methods to improve the circumstances when impaired by the improvidence attending unaccustomed prosperity.

There is another domestic practice which it is almost idle to mention, because it is so difficult to redress, since such is the present state of society that even the conscientious think themselves obliged to concur in it. That ingenuity which could devise some effectual substitute for the daily and hourly lie of *Not at home*, would deserve well of society. Why will not some of those illustrious ladies who lead in the fashionable world invent some phrase which shall equally rescue from destruction the time of the master and the veracity of the servant? Some new and appropriate expression, the not adopting which should be branded with the stigma of vulgarity, might accomplish that which the charge of its being immoral has failed to accomplish.

The expediency of the denial itself, no one will dispute, who has a just idea of the value of time. Some scrupulous persons so very much dispute the lawfulness of making their servants' tongue the medium of any kind of falsehood, as to make it a point of conscience rather to lay themselves open to the irruption of every idle invader, who sallies out on morning visits bent on the destruction of business and the annihilation of study. People of very strict integrity lament that this practice induces a general spirit of lying, mixes itself with the habit, and by a quality, the reverse of an alterative, gradually undermines the moral constitution.—Others on the contrary assert, that this is one of those lies of convention, no more intended to deceive, than the *dear sir* at the beginning, or your *humble servant* at the close of a letter to a person who is not dear to you, and to whom you owe no subjection. There is, however, this very material difference, that if the first be a falsehood, you do not convey it by proxy : You

use it yourself, and you use it to one who sets no more value on your words than you intended he should ; and who shews you he does not, by using the same stated phrase in return, in addressing you, for whom he cares as little. Here the words pass for no more than they are worth.

The ill effects of the custom we are lamenting may be traced in marking the gradual initiation of an unpractised country servant. And who has not felt for his virtuous distress, when he has been ordered to call back a more favoured visitant, whom he had just sent away with the assurance that his lady was not at home? Who has not seen his suppressed indignation at being obliged to become himself the detector of that falsehood of which he had been before the instrument? But a little practice and a repetition of reproof for even daring to *look* honest, soon cures this fault, especially as he is sure to be commended, in proportion to the increased firmness of his voice, and the steadiness of his countenance.

If this evil, petty as it may seem to be, be really without a remedy ; if the state of society be such that it cannot be redressed, let us not be so unreasonable as to expect that a servant will equivocate in small instances and not in great ones. To hope that he will always lie for your convenience, and never for his own, is perhaps expecting more from human nature, in a low and uncultivated state, than we have any right to expect. Nor should the master look for undeviating and perfect rectitude from his servant, in whom the principle of veracity is daily and hourly weakened in conformity to his own command.

Let us bring home the case to ourselves, the only fair way of determining in all cases of conscience. Suppose that we had established it into a system to allow ourselves regularly to lie on one certain, given subject, every day, and every hour in the day ; while we continued to value ourselves on the most undeviating adherence to truth on every other point. Who shall say, that at



the end of one year's tolerated and systematic lying, on this individual subject, we should continue to look upon falsehood in general with the same abhorrence we did when we first entered upon this partial exercise of it.

There is an evil newly crept into polished society, and it comes under a mask so specious, that they who are allured by it, come not seldom under the description of *Good sort of people*. I allude to SUNDAY CONCERTS. Many who would be startled at a profane, or even a light amusement, allow themselves to fancy that the name of *sacred music* sanctifies the diversion. But if those more favoured beings, whom Providence enables to live in ease and affluence, do not make these petty renunciations of their own ways, and their own pleasure, what criterion have we by which to judge of their sincerity? For as the goodness of Providence has exempted them from painful occupations, they have neither labour from which to rest, nor business from which

to refrain. A little abstinence from pleasure is the only valid evidence they have to give of their obedience to the divine precept.

I know with what indignant scorn this remark will, by many, be received: I know that much will be advanced in favour of the sanctity of this amusement. I shall be told that the words are, many of them, extracted from the Bible, and that the composition is the divine Handel's. But were the angel Gabriel the poet, the archangel Michael the composer, and the song of the Lamb the subject, it would not abrogate that statute of the Most High, which has said, "Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath day, and thy SERVANT, and thy CATTLE, shall do no manner of work."—I am persuaded that the hallelujahs of heaven would make no moral music to the ear of a conscientious person, while he reflected that multitudes of servants are through this means waiting in the street, exposed to every temptation; engaged, perhaps, in profane

swearing, and idle, if not dissolute conversation: and the very cattle are deprived of that rest which the tender mercy of God was graciously pleased, by an astonishing condescension, to include in the commandment.

But I will, for the sake of argument, so far concede as to allow of the innocence and even piety of Sunday concerts: I will suppose (what, however, does not often happen) that no unhallowed strains are ever introduced; I will admit that some attend these concerts with a view to cultivate devout affections; that they cherish the serious impressions excited by the music, and retire in such a frame of spirit as convinces them that the heart was touched while the ear was gratified: nay, I *would* grant, if such a concession would be accepted, that the intervals were filled up with conversation, “whereby one may edify another:”—yet all these good effects, allowing them really to have been produced, will not remove the invincible objection of an EVIL EX-

AMPLE ; and what liberal spirit would refuse any reasonable sacrifice of its own pleasure to so important a motive ? Your servants have been accustomed to consider a concert as a secular diversion ; if you, therefore, continue it on a Sunday, will not they also expect to be indulged on that day with their common amusements ? Saint Paul, who was a very liberal thinker, believed it prudent to make frequent sacrifices of things indifferent in themselves. He was willing to deny himself a harmless and lawful gratification, *even as long as the world stood*, rather than shock the tender consciences of men of less understanding. Where a practice is neither good nor evil in itself, it is both discreet and generous to avoid it, if it can be attended with any possible danger to minds less enlightened, and to faith less confirmed.

But religion apart, I have sometimes wondered that people do not yield to the temptation that is held out to them, of abstaining from diversions one day in seven,

upon motives of mere human policy; as voluptuaries sometimes fast, to give a keener relish to the delights of the next repast: for pleasure, like an over-fed lamp, is extinguished by the excess of its own aliment: not to say that the instrument of our gratification is often converted into our bane. Anacreon was choaked by a grape stone. The lovers of pleasure are not always prudent, even upon their own principles; for I am persuaded that this world would afford much more real satisfaction than it does, if we did not press, and torture, and strain it, in order to make it yield what it does not contain: Much good, and much pleasure, it does liberally bestow; but no labour, or art, can extract from it that elixir of peace, that divine essence of content, which it is not in its nature to produce. There is good sense in searching into every blessing for its *hidden* properties; but it is folly to ransack and plunder it for such properties as the experience of all ages tell us are *foreign* to it. We exhaust the

world of its pleasures, and then lament that it is empty ; we wring those pleasures to the very dregs, and then complain that they are vapid. We erroneously seek in the world for that peace which we are repeatedly told is not to be found in it. While we neglect to seek it in *Him* who has expressly told us that *our* happiness depends on *his* having “ overcome the world.” — “ Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you ; not as *the world giveth give I unto you.*”

I shall, probably, be accused of a very narrow and fanatical spirit, in animadverting on a practice so little suspected of harm as the frequenting of public walks and gardens on a Sunday, and, certainly there cannot be an amusement more entirely harmless in itself. But I must appeal to the honest testimony of our own hearts, if the *effect* be favourable to seriousness. Do we commonly retire from these places with the impression which were made on us at church in their full force? We entered these sprightly scenes, perhaps, with a strong

remaining tincture of that devout spirit which the public worship had infused into the mind : but have we not felt it gradually diminish? Have not our powers of resistance grown insensibly weaker? Has not the gaiety of the scenes converted, as it were, argument into illusion? The doctrines, which in the morning appeared the sober dictates of reason, now seem unreasonably rigid ; and truths, which were then thought incontrovertible, now appear impertinent. To answer objections is much easier than to withstand allurements. The understanding may controvert a startling proposition with less difficulty than the sliding heart can resist the infection of seducing gaiety. To oppose a cold and speculative faith to the enchantment of present pleasure, is to fight with inadequate weapons; it is resisting arms with rules; it is combating a temptation with an idea. Whereas, he who engages in the Christian warfare, will find that his chief strength consists in knowing that he is very weak; his progress will de-

pend on his conviction that he is every hour liable to go back; his success, on the persuasion of his fallibility; his safety, on the assurance that to retreat from danger is his highest glory, and to decline the combat his truest courage.

Whatever indisposes the mind for the duty of any particular season, though it assume ever so innocent a form, cannot be perfectly right. If the heart be laid open to the incursion of vain imaginations, and worldly thoughts, it matters little by what gate the enemy entered. If the effect be injurious, the cause cannot be quite harmless. It is the perfidious property of certain pleasures, that, though they seem not to have the smallest harm in themselves, they imperceptibly indispose the mind to every thing that is good.

Many readers will be apt to produce against all this preciseness, that hackneyed remark which one is tired of hearing, that Sunday diversions are allowed publicly in many foreign countries, as well in those



professing the reformed religion, as popery. But the corruptions of one part of the Protestant world are no reasonable justification of the evil practices of another. Error and infirmity can never be proper objects of imitation. It is still a remnant of the old leaven: and as to pleading the practice of Roman Catholic countries, one blushes to hear an enlightened Protestant justifying himself by examples drawn from that benighted religion, whose sanctions we should in any other instance be ashamed to plead.

Besides, though I am far from vindicating the amusements permitted on Sundays in foreign countries, by allowing that established custom and long prescription have the privilege of conferring right; yet foreigners may, at least, plead the sanction of custom, and the connivance of the law: while in this country, the law of the land and established usage, concurring with still higher motives, give a sort of venerable sanction to religious observances, the breach of which will be always more liable to mis-

construction than in countries where so many motives do not concur in its support.

I do not assert that all those who neglect a strict observation of the Lord's day are remiss in the performance of all their other duties: though they should bear in mind that the observance of their other duties is no atonement for the neglect of this; I will however venture to affirm, that all whom I have remarked conscientiously to observe this day from right motives, have been uniformly attentive to their general conduct. It has been the opinion of many wise and good men,\* that Christianity will

\* The testimony of one lawyer will, perhaps, be less suspected than that of many priests. "I have  
" ever found," says the great Lord Chief Justice Hale,  
" by a strict and diligent observation, that a due ob-  
" servance of the duty of Sunday has ever had joined  
" to it a blessing upon the rest of my time; and the  
" week that has been so begun has been blessed and  
" prosperous to me: and, on the other side, when I  
" have been negligent of the duties of this day, the  
" rest of the week has been unsuccessful and unhappy  
" to my own secular employments. So that I could

stand, or fall, as this day it neglected, or observed. Sunday seems to be a kind of Christian palladium; and the city of God will never be totally taken by the enemy till the observance of that be quite lost. Every sincere soldier of the great Captain of our Salvation must, therefore, exert himself in its defence, as ever he would preserve the divine Fort of Revelation against the confederated attacks of the world and the Devil.

I shall proceed to enumerate a few of the many causes which seem to impede well-disposed people in the progress of religion. None perhaps contributes more to it than that cold, prudential caution against the folly of aiming at *perfection*, so frequent in the mouths of the wordly wise. “We must take the world,” say they, “as we find it; reformation is not our business, easily make an estimate of my successes the week following, by the manner of my passing this day. AND I DO NOT WRITE THIS LIGHTLY, BUT BY LONG AND SOUND EXPERIENCE.”

*Sir Matthew Hale's Works.*

“ and we are commanded not to be righteous overmuch.” A text by the way entirely misunderstood and perverted by people of this sort. But these admonitions are contrary to every maxim in human affairs. In arts and letters\* the most consummate models are held out to imitation. We never hear any body cautioned against becoming too wise, too learned, or too rich. Activity in business is accounted commendable; in friendship it is amiable; in ambition it is laudable. The highest exertions of industry are commended; the finest energies of genius are admired. In all the perishing concerns of earthly things, zeal is extolled as exhibiting marks of a sprightly temper and a vigorous mind. Strange! that to be “ fervent in spirit,” should only be disho-

\* When Pliny the younger was accused of despising the degenerate eloquence of his own age, and of the vanity of aspiring at perfection in oratory, and of endeavouring to become the rival of Cicero; instead of denying the charge, he exclaimed with a noble spirit, “ I think it the height of folly not always to propose to myself the most perfect object of imitation.”

nourable in that single instance which should seem to demand unremitting diligence and <sup>an</sup>extinguishable warmth.

But after all, is an excessive and intemperate zeal the *common* vice of the times? Is there any *very* imminent danger that the enthusiasm of the great should transport them to dangerous and inconvenient excesses? Are our young men of fashion so *very* much led away by the fervours of piety, that they require to have their imaginations tamed, and their ardours cooled by the freezing maxims of worldly wisdom? Is the spirit of the age so *very* much inclined to catch and communicate the fire of devotion, as to require to be damped by admonition, or extinguished by ridicule? When the inimitable Cervantes attacked the wild notions and romantic ideas which misled the age in which he lived, he did wisely, because he combated an actually existing evil; but in this latter end of the eighteenth century, there seems to be little more occasion (among persons of rank, I

mean) of cautions against enthusiasm than against chivalry; and he who declaims against religious excesses in the company of well-bred people, shews himself to be as little acquainted with the manners of the times in which he lives, as he would do who should think it a point of duty to write another Don Quixote.

Among the devices dangerous to our moral safety, certain favourite and specious maxims are not the least successful, as they carry with them an imposing air of indulgent candour, and always seem to be on the popular side of good-nature. One of the most obvious of these is, that method of reconciling the conscience to practices not decidedly wicked, and yet not scrupulously right, by the qualifying phrase, *that there is no harm in it*. I am mistaken if more innocent persons do not inflame their spiritual reckoning by this treacherous apology, than by almost any other means. Few are systematically, or premeditatedly wicked; or propose to themselves, at first, more than

such small indulgences as they are persuaded *have no harm in them*. But this latitude is gradually and imperceptibly enlarged. As the expression is vague and indeterminate ; as the darkest shade of virtue, and the lightest shade of vice, melt into no very incongruous colouring ; as the bounds between good and evil are not always so precisely defined but that he who ventures to the confines of the one, will find himself on the borders of the other ; every one furnishes his own definition ; every one extends the supposed limits a little farther ; till the bounds which fence in permitted from unlawful pleasures are gradually broken down, and the marks which separated them imperceptibly destroyed.

It is, perhaps, one of the most alarming symptoms of the degeneracy of morals in the present day, that the distinctions of right and wrong are almost swept away in polite conversation. The most grave offences are often named with cool indifference ; the most shameful profligacy with affected ten-

derness and indulgent toleration. The substitution of the word *gallantry* for that crime which stabs domestic happiness and conjugal virtue, is one of the most dangerous of all the modern abuses of language. Atrocious deeds should never be called by gentle names. This must certainly contribute, more than any thing, to diminish the horror of vice in the rising generation. That our passions should be too often engaged on the side of error, we may look for the cause, though not for the vindication, in the unresisted propensities of our constitution ; but that our *reason* should ever be exerted in its favor, that our *conversation* should ever be taught to palliate it, that our *judgment* should ever look on it with indifference, that our tongues should ever be employed to confound the eternal distinctions of right and wrong ; this has no shadow of excuse ; because this can pretend to no foundation in nature, no apology in temptation, no palliative in passion.

However defective, therefore, our practice



may be ; however we may be eluded by seduction, or precipitated by passion, let us beware of lowering the STANDARD of RIGHT. This induces an imperceptible corruption into the heart, stagnates the noblest principle of action, irrecoverably debases the sense of moral and religious obligation, and prevents us from living up to the height of our nature, because it prevents us from knowing its possible elevation. It cuts off all communication with virtue, and almost prevents the possibility of a return to it. If we do not rise as high as we aim, we shall rise the higher for having aimed at a lofty mark : but where the RULE is low, the practice cannot be high, though the converse of the proposition is not proportionably true.

Nothing more benumbs the exertions of ardent youthful virtue than the cruel sneer which worldly prudence bestows on active goodness, and the cool derision it expresses at the defeat of a benevolent scheme, of which malice, rather than penetration, had

foreseen the failure. Alas! there is little need of any such discouragements. The world is a climate which too naturally chills a glowing generosity, and contracts an expanded heart. The zeal of the most sanguine is but too apt to cool, and the activity of the most diligent, to slacken of itself: and the disappointments which Benevolence encounters in the failure of her best-concerted projects, and the frequent depravity of the most chosen objects of her bounty, would soon dry up the amplest streams of charity, were they not fed by the living fountain of religious principle.

I cannot dismiss this part of my subject without animadverting on the too prompt alacrity, even of worthy people, to disseminate, in public and general conversation, instances of their unsuccessful attempts to do good. I never hear a charity story begun to be related in mixed company, that I do not tremble for the catastrophe, lest it should exhibit some mortifying disappointment, which may deter the inexperienced from

running any generous hazards, and excite harsh suspicions, at an age, when it is less dishonourable to meet with a few casual hurts, and transient injuries, than to go cased in the cumbersome and impenetrable armour of distrust. The liberal should be particularly cautious how they furnish the avaricious with creditable pretences for saving their money, since all the instances of the mortifications the humane meet with are carefully treasured up, and added to the armory of the covetous man's arguments, and never fail to be produced by him as defensive weapons, upon every fresh attack on his heart or his purse.

But I am willing to hope that that uncharitableness which we so often meet with in persons of advanced years, is not always the effect of a heart naturally hard. Misanthropy is very often nothing but abused sensibility. Long habits of the world, and a melancholy conviction how little good he has been able to do in it, harden many a tender-hearted person. The milk of human

kindness becomes soured by repeated acts of ingratitude. This commonly induces an indifference to the well-being of others, from a hopelessness of adding to the stock of human virtue and human happiness. This uncomfortable disease is very fond of spreading its own contagion, which is a cruelty to the health of young and uninfected virtue.—For this distemper, generated by a too sanguine disposition, and grown chronic from repeated disappointments, from having rated worldly virtue and worldly generosity too highly, there is but one remedy, or rather one prevention : and this is a genuine principle of piety. He who is once convinced that he is to assist his fellow-creatures, because it is the will of God ; he who is persuaded that his forgiving his fellow-servant the hundred pence is a condition annexed to the remission of his own ten thousand talents, will soon get above all uneasiness when the consequence does not answer his expectation. He will soon become only anxious to do his duty.

humbly committing events to higher hands. Disappointments will then only serve to refine his motives, and purify his virtue. His charity will then become a sacrifice with which God is well pleased ! His affections will be more spiritualized, and his devotions more intense. Nothing short of such a courageous piety, growing on the stock of Christian principle, can preserve a heart hackneyed in the world from relaxed diligence, or criminal despair.

People in general are not aware of the mischief of judging of the rightness of any action by its prosperity, or of the excellence of any institution by the abuse of it. We must never proportion our exertions to our success, but to our duty. If every laudable undertaking were to be dropped because it failed in some cases, or was abused in others, there would not be left an Alms House, a Charity-School, or an Hospital in the land. If every right practice were to be discontinued because it had been found not to be successful in every instance, and if every

right principle were rejected because it had not been operative in all cases, this false reasoning pushed to the extreme, might at last be brought as an argument for shutting up our churches, and burning our bibles.

But if, on the one hand, there is a proud and arrogant discretion which ridicules, as Utopian and romantic, every generous project of the active and the liberal; so there is on the other, a sort of popular bounty which arrogates to itself the exclusive name of *feeling*, and rejects with disdain the influence of an higher principle. I am far from intending to depreciate this humane and exquisitely tender sentiment which the beneficent Author of our nature gave us as a stimulus to remove the distresses of others, in order to get rid of our own uneasiness. I would only observe, that where not strengthened by superior motives, it is a casual and precarious instrument of good, and ceases to operate, except in the immediate presence, and within the audible cry

of misery. This sort of feeling forgets that any calamity exists which is out of its own sight; and though it would empty its purse for such an occasional object as rouses transient sensibility, yet it seldom makes any stated provision for miseries, which are not the less real because they do not obtrude upon the sight, and awaken the tenderness of immediate sympathy. This is a mechanical charity, which requires springs and wheels to set it a going; whereas real christian charity does not wait to be acted upon by impressions and impulses.

Another cause which very much intimidates well-disposed people, is their terror, lest the character of piety should derogate from their reputation as men of sense. Every man of the world naturally arrogates to himself the superiority of understanding over every religious man. He, therefore, who has been accustomed to set a high value on his intellectual powers, must have made very considerable advances in piety before he can acquire a magnanimous indifference to this usurped superiority of ano-

ther : before he can submit to the parsimonious allotment of wit and learning, which is assigned him by the supercilious hand of worldly wisdom. But this attack upon his pride will be no bad touchstone of his sincerity. If his advances have not been so considerable, then, by an hypocrisy of the least common kind, he will be industrious to appear less good than he really is, lest the distinction of his serious propensities should draw on him the imputation of ordinary parts or low attainments. But the danger is, that while he is too sedulously intent on maintaining his pretensions as an ingenious man, his claims to piety should daily become weaker. That which is long suppressed is too frequently extinguished.

Nothing, perhaps, more plainly discovers the faint impression which religion has really made upon our hearts, than this disinclination, even of good people, to serious conversation. Let me not be misunderstood ; I do not mean the wrangle of debate ; I do not mean the gall of controversy ; I do not mean the fiery strife of *opinions*, than which



nothing can be less favourable to good nature, good manners, or good society. But it were to be wished, that it was not thought ill-bred and indiscreet, that the escapes of the tongue should now and then betray the "abundance of the heart:" that, when such subjects are casually introduced, a discouraging coldness did not instantly take place of that sprightly animation of countenance which made common topics interesting. If these "outward and visible signs" were unequivocal, we should form but moderate ideas of the "inward and spiritual grace." It were to be wished, that such subjects were not thought dull, *merely* because they are good; it were to be wished that they had the common chance of fair discussion; and that parts and learning were not ashamed to exert themselves on occasions where both might appear to so much advantage. If the heart were really interested, could the affections forbear now and then to break out into language? Artists, physicians, merchants, lawyers, and scholars,

keep up the spirit of their professions by mutual intercourse. New lights are struck out, improvements are suggested, emulation is kindled, love of the object is inflamed, mistakes of the judgment are rectified, and desire of excellence is excited by communication. And is piety alone so very easy of acquisition, so very natural to our corrupt hearts, as to require none of the helps which are indispensable on all other subjects? Travellers, who are to visit any particular country, are full of earnest inquiry, and diligent research; they think nothing indifferent by which their future pleasure or advantage may be affected. Every hint which may procure them any information, or caution them against any danger, is thankfully received; and all this, because they are really in *earnest* in their preparation for this journey; and do fully *believe*, not only that there is such a country, but that they themselves have a personal, individual interest in the good, or evil, which may be found in it.

A farther danger to *good kind of people* seems to arise from a mistaken idea, that only great and actual sins are to be guarded against. Whereas, in effect, temptations to the grosser sins do not so frequently occur to those who are hedged in by the blessings of affluence, by a regard to reputation and the care of health; while sins of omission make up, perhaps, the most formidable part of *their* catalogue of offences. These generally supply in number what they want in weight, and are the more dangerous for being little ostensible. They continue to be repeated with less regret, because the remembrance of their predecessors does not, like the remembrance of formal, actual crimes, assume a body and a shape, and terrify by the impression of particular scenes and circumstances. While the memory of transacted evil haunts a tender conscience by perpetual apparition; omitted duty, having no local or personal existence, not being recorded by standing acts and deeds, and dates, and having no distinct image to

which the mind may recur, sinks into quiet oblivion, without deeply wounding the conscience, or tormenting the imagination. These omissions were, perhaps, among the "secret sins," from which the royal penitent so earnestly desired to be cleansed : and it is worthy of the most serious consideration, that these are the offences against which the Gospel pronounces some of its very alarming denunciations. It is not less against negative than against actual evil, that affectionate exhortation, lively remonstrance, and pointed parable, are exhausted. It is against the tree which bore no fruit, the lamp which had no oil, the unprofitable servant who made no use of his talent, that the severe sentence is denounced ; as well as against *corrupt* fruit, *bad* oil, and talents *ill* employed. We are led to believe, from the same high authority, that omitted duties and neglected opportunities, will furnish no inconsiderable portion of our future condemnation. A very awful part of the decision, in the great day of account, seems

to be reserved merely for carelessness, omissions, and negatives. Ye gave me no meat ; ye gave me no drink ; ye took me not in ; ye visited me not. On the punishment attending positive crimes, as being more naturally obvious, it was not, perhaps, thought so necessary to insist.

Another cause, which still further impedes the reception of Religion even among the well-disposed, is, that garment of sadness in which people delight to suppose her dressed ; and that life of hard austerity, and pining abstinence, which they pretend she enjoins her disciples. And it were well if this were only the misrepresentation of her declared enemies ; but unhappily, it is the too frequent misconception of her injudicious friends. But such an over-charged picture is not more unamiable than it is unlike : for I will venture to affirm, that Religion, with all her beautiful and becoming sanctity, imposes fewer sacrifices, not only of rational, but of pleasurable enjoyment, than the uncontrolled dominion of any one vice.

Her service is not only safety hereafter, but freedom here. She is not so tyrannizing as appetite, so exacting as the World, nor so despotic as Fashion. Let us try the case by a parallel, and examine it, not as affecting our virtue, but our pleasure. Does Religion forbid the cheerful enjoyments of life as rigorously as Avarice forbids them? Does she require such sacrifices of our ease as Ambition, or such renunciations of our quiet as Pride? Does Devotion *murder sleep* like dissipation? Does she destroy Health like Intemperance? Does she annihilate Fortune like Gaming? Does she imbitter Life like Discord; or abridge it like Dueling? Does Religion impose more vigilance than Suspicion? or inflict half as many mortifications as Vanity? Vice has her martyrs: and the most austere and self-denying Ascetic (who mistakes the genius of Christianity almost as much as her enemies mistake it) never tormented himself with such cruel and causeless severity as that with which Envy lacerates her unhappy votaries. Worldly

honour obliges us to be at the trouble of resenting injuries ; and worldly prudence obliges us to be at the expence of litigating about them ; but Religion spares us the inconvenience of the one and the cost of the other, by the summary command to forgive ; and by this injunction she consults our happiness no less than our virtue : for the torment of constantly hating any one must be, at least, equal to the sin of it. And resentment is an evil so costly to our peace that we should find it more cheap to forgive even were it not more right. If this estimate be fairly made, then is the balance clearly on the side of Religion even in the article of pleasure.

It is an infirmity not uncommon to *good kind of people*, to comfort themselves that they are living in the exercise of some one natural good quality, and to make a religious merit of a constitutional happiness. They have also a strong propensity to separate what God has joined ; belief and practice ; the creed and the command-

ments ; actions and motives ; moral duty and religious obedience. Whereas, you will hardly find, in all the New Testament, a moral, or a social virtue that is not hedged in by some religious injunction : scarcely a good action enjoined towards others, but it is connected with some exhortation to personal purity. All the charities of benevolence are, in general, so agreeable to the natural make of the heart, that it is a very tender mercy of God to have made that a duty, which, to finer spirits, would have been irresistible as an inclination ; and to have annexed the highest future reward to the greatest present pleasure. But in order to give a religious sanction to a social virtue, the duty of “ visiting the fatherless and widow in their affliction,” is inseparably attached to the difficult and self-denying injunction of “ keeping ourselves unspotted from the world.” This adjunct is the more needful, as many are apt to make a kind of moral commutation, and to allow them-



selves so much pleasure in exchange for so much charity. They think they may fairly pay themselves for abstinence from one fault by indulgence in another. But the Christian virtues derive their highest lustre from association : they have such a spirit of society, that they are weak and imperfect when solitary ; their radiance is brightened by an intermingling of their beams, and their natural strength multiplied by their alliance with each other.

It cannot be denied that *good sort of people* sometimes use religion as the voluptuous use physic. As the latter employ medicine to make health agree with luxury, the former consider religion as a medium to reconcile peace of conscience with a life of pleasure. But no moral chemistry can blend natural contradictions. In all such unnatural mixtures the world will still be uppermost, and religion will disdain to coalesce with its antipathy.

Let me not be suspected of intending to insinuate that religion encourages men to

fly from society, and hide themselves in solitudes : to renounce the generous and important duties of active life, for the visionary, cold, and fruitless virtues of an Hermitage, or a Cloyster. No : the mischief arises not from our living in the world, but from the world living in us ; occupying our hearts, and monopolizing our affections. Action is the life of virtue, and the world is the theatre of action. Perhaps some of the most perfect patterns of human conduct may be found in the most public stations, and among the busiest orders of mankind. It is, indeed, a scene of trial, but the glory of the triumph is proportioned to the peril of the conflict. A sense of danger quickens circumspection, and makes virtue more vigilant. Lot, perhaps is not the only character who maintained his integrity in a great city, proverbially wicked, and forfeited it in the bosom of retirement.

It has been said that worldly *good sort of people* are a greater credit to their profession, by exhibiting more cheerfulness, gaiety,

and happiness, than are visible in serious Christians. If this assertion be true, which I very much suspect, is it not probable that the apparent ease and gaiety of the former may be derived from the same source of consolation which Mrs. Quickly recommends to Falstaff, in Shakespeare's admirable picture of the death-bed scene of that witty profligate? "He wished for  
" comfort, quoth mine hostess, and began  
" to talk of God; now I to comfort him,  
" begged him he should not think of God:  
" it was time enough to trouble himself  
" with these things." Do not many deceive themselves by drawing water from these dry wells of comfort? and patch up a precarious and imperfect happiness in this world, by diverting their attention from the concerns of the next?

Another obstruction to the growth of piety, is that unhappy prejudice which even good kind of people too often entertain against those who differ from them in opinion. Every man who is sincerely in

earnest to advance the interests of religion, will have acquired such a degree of candour, as to become indifferent by whom good is done, or who has the reputation of doing it, provided it be actually done. He will be anxious to increase the stock of human virtue, and of human happiness, by every possible means. He will whet and sharpen every instrument of goodness, though it be not cast in his own mould, or fashioned after his own pattern. He will never consider whether the form suits his own particular taste, but whether the instrument itself be calculated to accomplish the work of his master. -

I shall conclude these loose and immethodical hints with a plain, tho' short address to those who content themselves with a decent profession of the doctrines, and a formal attendance on the offices, instead of a diligent discharge of the duties of Christianity. Believe, and forgive me!—you are the people who lower religion in the eyes of its enemies. The openly profane, the

avowed enemies to God and goodness, serve to confirm the truths they mean to oppose, to illustrate the doctrines they deny, and to accomplish the very predictions they affect to disbelieve. But you, like an inadequate and faithless prop, overturn the edifice which you pretend to support.—

When an acute and keen-eyed infidel measures your lives with the rule by which you profess to walk; he finds so little analogy between them, the copy is so unlike the pattern, that this inconsistency of yours is the pass through which his most dangerous attack is made. And I must confess, that, of all the arguments, which the malignant industry of infidelity has been able to muster, the negligent conduct of professing Christians seems to me to be the only one which is really capable of staggering a man of sense.—He hears of a spiritual and self-denying religion; he reads the beatitudes; he observes that the grand artillery of the Gospel is planted against pride and sensuality. He then turns to the transcript of

this perfect original; to the lives which pretend to be fashioned by it. There he sees, with triumphant derision, that pride, self-love, luxury, self-sufficiency, unbounded personal expence, and an inordinate appetite for pleasure, are reputable vices in the eyes of many of those who acknowledge the truth of the Christian doctrines. He weighs that meekness to which a blessing is promised, with that arrogance which is too common to be very dishonourable. He compares that non-conformity to the world, which the Bible makes the criterion of a believer, with that rage for amusement which is not considered as disreputable in a Christian. He opposes the self-denying and lowly character of the Author of our faith with the sensual practices of his followers. He finds little resemblance between the restraints prescribed, and the gratifications indulged in. What conclusions must a speculative, reasoning sceptic draw from such premises? Is it any wonder that such phrases as “ a broken spirit,” a

“ contrite heart,” “ poverty of spirit,” “ refraining the soul,” “ keeping it low,” and “ casting down high imaginations,” should be to the unbeliever “ foolishness,” when such humiliating doctrines are a “ stumbling block” to professing Christians; to Christians who cannot cordially relish a religion which professedly tells them it was sent to stain the pride of human glory, and “ to exclude boasting?”

But though the passive and self-denying virtues are not high in the esteem of mere good sort of people, yet they are peculiarly the evangelical virtues. The world extols brilliant actions; the Gospel enjoins good habits and right motives: it seldom inculcates those splendid deeds which make heroes, or teaches those lofty sentiments which constitute philosophers; but it enjoins the harder task of renouncing self, of living uncorrupted in the world, of subduing besetting sins, and of “ not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought.” The *acquisition* of glory was the precept of other

religions, the *contempt* of it is the perfection of Christianity.

Let us then be consistent, and we shall never be contemptible, even in the eyes of our enemies. Let not the unbeliever say that we have one set of opinions for our theory, and another for our practice; that to the vulgar

We shew the rough and thorny way to heav'n,  
While we the primrose path of dalliance tread.

Would it not become the character of a man of sense, of which consistency is a most unequivocal proof, to choose some rule and abide by it? An extempore Christian is a ridiculous character. Fixed principles, if they be really principles of the heart, and not merely opinions of the understanding, will be followed by a consistent course of action; while indecision of spirit will produce instability of conduct. If there be a model which we profess to admire, let us square our lives by it. If either the Koran of Mahomet, or the Revelations of Zoro-



aster, be a perfect guide, let us follow one of them. If either Epicurus, Zeno, or Confucius, be the peculiar object of our veneration and respect, let us avowedly fashion our conduct by the dictates of their philosophy ; and then, though we may be wrong, we shall not be absurd ; we may be erroneous, but we shall not be inconsistent ; but if the Bible be in truth the word of God, as we profess to believe, we need look no farther for a consummate pattern. “ If the Lord be God, let us follow HIM.” If Christ be a sacrifice for sin, let Him be also to us the example of an holy life.

But I am willing to flatter myself that the moral and intellectual scene about us begins to brighten. I indulge myself in moments of the most enthusiastic and delightful vision, that things are beginning gradually to lead to the fulfilment of that promise, that “ all the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.” I take encouragement that that glorious prophecy,

that " of the increase of his government  
" there shall be no end," seems to be gradually accomplishing; and in no instance more, perhaps, than in the noble attempt about to be made for the abolition of the African Slave-trade.\* For what event can human wisdom foresee more likely to contribute to " give the Son the Heathen  
" for his inheritance, and the uttermost  
" parts of the earth for his possession," than the success of such an enterprise, which will restore the lustre of the British name, and cut off at a single stroke as large and disgraceful a portion of national guilt as ever impaired the virtue, or dishonoured the councils of a Christian country.

A good spirit seems to be at work. A catholic temper is diffusing itself among all sects and parties: an enlightened candour, and a liberal toleration, were never more prevalent; good men combat each other's

\* This interesting question was then beginning to be agitated in parliament. The struggle has been long! The event has been glorious!

opinions with less rancour, and better manners;\* they hate each other less for those points in which they disagree, and love each other more for those points in which they join issue than they formerly did. We have many public encouragements; we have a pious king; a wise and virtuous minister; very many respectable, and not a few serious clergy. Their number I am willing to hope is daily increasing. Among these some of the first in dignity are the most exemplary in conduct. An increasing desire to instruct the poor, to inform the ignorant, and to reclaim the vicious, is spreading among us. The late Royal Proclamation affords an honourable sanction to virtuous endeavours, and lends nerves and sinews to the otherwise feeble exertions of individuals, by enforcing laws wisely planned, but hitherto feebly executed. In short, there is a good hope that we shall more and more become “that happy people who have the Lord for their God:”

\* This was written before the French Revolution !!!

that as prosperity is already within our walls peace and virtue may abide in our dwellings.

But vain will be all endeavours after *partial* and *subordinate* amendment. Reformation must begin with the GREAT, or it will never be effectual. *Their* example is the fountain whence the vulgar draw their habits, actions, and characters. To expect to reform the poor while the opulent are corrupt, is to throw odours into the stream while the springs are poisoned.

If, therefore, the Rich and Great will not, from a liberal spirit of doing right, and from a Christian spirit of fearing God, abstain from those offences, for which the poor are to suffer fines and imprisonments, effectual good cannot be done. It will signify little to lay penalties on the horses of the drover, or on the waggon of the husbandman, while the chariot wheels of the great roll with incessant motion; and while the sacred day on which the sons of industry are commanded by royal proclamation to desist from travelling, is for that very reason selected for the journeys of the

Great, and preferred, because the road is encumbered with fewer interruptions. But will it not strike every well-meaning Sunday traveller with a generous remorse, when he reflects that he owes the accommodation of an unobstructed road to the very obedience which is paid by others to that divine and human law which he is in the very act of violating?

Will not the common people think it a little inequitable that they are abridged of the diversions of the public-house and the gaming-yard on Sunday evening, when they shall hear that many houses of the first nobility are on that evening crowded with company, and such amusements carried on as are prohibited by human laws even on common days? As imitation, and a desire of being in the fashion, govern the lower orders of mankind, it is to be feared that they will not think reformation reputable, while they see it *recommended* only, and not *practised*, by their superiors. A precept counteracted by an example, is worse than

fruitless, it is ridiculous : and the common people will be tempted to set an inferior value on goodness, when they find it is only expected from the lower ranks. They cannot surely but smile at the disinterestedness of their superiors, who, while they seem anxiously concerned to save others, are so little solicitous about their own state. The ambitious vulgar will hardly relish a salvation which is only intended for plebeians ; nor will they be apt to entertain very exalted notions of that promised future reward, the road to which they perceive their betters are so much more earnest to point out to *them*, than to walk in themselves.

It was not by inflicting pains and penalties that Christianity first made its way into the world : the divine truths it inculcated received irresistible confirmation from the **LIVES, PRACTICES, and EXAMPLES** of its venerable professors. These were arguments which no popular prejudice could resist, no Jewish logic refute, and no Pagan persecution discredit. Had the primitive

Christians only *praised and promulgated* the most perfect religion the world ever saw, it would have produced but very slender effects on the faith and manners of the people. The astonishing consequences which followed the pure doctrines of the Gospel, would never have been produced if the jealous and inquisitive eye of malice could have detected that the DOCTRINES the Christians recommended had not been illustrated by the LIVES they led.

**POSTSCRIPT**

TO THE

**SECOND EDITION.**

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THE public favour having already brought this little Essay to another Edition, the Author has been sedulous to discover any particular objections that have been made to it. Since the preceding sheets were printed off, it has been suggested by some very respectable persons who have honoured this slight performance with their notice, that it inculcates a too rigid austerity, and carries the point of observing Sunday much too far ; that it takes away all the usual occupations of the day, without substituting any others in their stead ; and that it only pulls down a wrong system, without so much as attempting to build up a right one. To these observations the Author begs leave to reply, that whilst



animadverting on error, the insisting on obvious duty was purposely omitted. To tell people what they already know to be right, was less the intention of this address, than to observe upon practices which long habit had prevented them from perceiving to be wrong. Sensible and well-meaning persons can hardly be at a loss on a subject which has exhausted precept and wearied exhortation. To have expatiated on it, would only have been to repeat what is already known and acknowledged to be right, even by those whom the hurry of engagements will not allow to take breath one day in a week, that they may run the race of pleasure with more alacrity on the other six. But probably it is not the duties, but the amusements appropriated to the day about which the enquiry is made. It will, perhaps, be found, that the intervals of a Sunday regularly devoted to all its reasonable and obvious employments, are not likely to be so very tedious, but that they might be easily and pleasantly filled up by

cheerful, innocent, and instructive conversation. Human delights would be very circumscribed indeed if the practices here noticed as erroneous, included the whole circle of enjoyment. In addition to the appropriate pleasures of devotion, are the pleasures of retirement, the pleasures of friendship, the pleasures of intellect, and the pleasures of beneficence, to be estimated as nothing?

There will not be found, perhaps, a single person who shall honour these pages with a perusal, who has not been repeatedly told, with an air of imposing gravity, by those who produce cards on a Sunday evening, *that it is better to play than to talk scandal*. Before this pithy axiom was invented, it was not perhaps suspected that Sunday gaming would ever be adduced as an argument in favour of morals. Without entering into the comparative excellence of these two occupations, or presuming to determine which has a claim to pre-eminence of piety, may we not venture to be thankful

that these alternatives do not seem to empty the whole stock of human resource; but that something will still be left to occupy and to interest those who adopt neither the one nor the other?

People in the gay and elegant scenes of life are perpetually complaining that an extensive acquaintance, and the necessity of being constantly engaged in large circles and mixed assemblies, leaves them little leisure for family enjoyment, select conversation, and domestic delights. Others, with no less earnestness, lament that the hurry of public stations, and the necessary demands of active life, allow them no time for any but frivolous reading. Now the recurrence of one Sunday in every week seems to hold out an inviting remedy for both these evils. The sweet and delightful pleasures of family society might then be uninterruptedly enjoyed, by the habitual exclusion of trifling and idle visitors, who do not come to see their friends, but to get rid of themselves. Persons of fashion

living in the same house, and connected by the closest ties, whom business and pleasure keep asunder during the greatest part of the week, would then have an opportunity of spending a little time together, and of cultivating that friendship for each other, that affection for their children, and that intercourse with their Maker, to which the present manners are not *very* favourable. To the other set of complainers, those who can find no time to read, this interval naturally presents itself; and it so happens, that some of the most enlightened men the world ever saw have, not unfrequently, devoted their rare talents to subjects peculiarly suited to this day; and that not merely in the didactic form of sermons, which men of the world affect to disdain; but in every alluring shape which human ingenuity could assume. It can be fortunately produced among a thousand other instances, that the deepest metaphysician,\* the greatest astro-

\* Locke, Newton, Milton, Butler, Addison, Bacon, Boyle.

nomer, the sublimest poet, the acutest reasoner, the politest writer, the most consummate philosopher, and the profoundest investigator of nature, which this, or perhaps any country has produced, have all written on such subjects as are analogous to the business of the Lord's day. Such authors as these, even wits, philosophers, and men of the world, must acknowledge that it is not bigotry to read, nor enthusiasm to commend. Of this illustrious groupe only *one* was a clergyman, which to a certain class of readers will be a strong recommendation: though it is a little hard that the fastidiousness of modern taste should undervalue the learned and pious labours of divines, only because they are *professional*. In every other function, a man's compositions are not the less esteemed because they peculiarly belong to his more immediate business. Blackstone's opinions in jurisprudence are in high reputation, though he was a lawyer: Sydenham is still consulted as oracular in fevers, in spite of

his having been a physician ; and the Commentaries of Cæsar are of established authority in military operations, notwithstanding he was a soldier.



AN  
ESTIMATE  
OF THE  
*RELIGION*  
OF THE  
FASHIONABLE WORLD.

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There was never found in any age of the world, either Philosophy, or Sect, or Religion, or Law, or Discipline, which did so highly exalt the public good as the Christian Faith.

LORD BACON.

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that Christianity, like its Divine Author, is not only *denied* by those who in so many words disown their submission to its authority, but is *betrayed* by the still more treacherous disciple, even while he cries, *Hail, Master!*

For this visible declension of piety various reasons have been assigned, some of which however do not seem fully adequate to the effects ascribed to them. The author of a late popular pamphlet\* has accounted for the increased profligacy of the *common people*, by ascribing it, very justly, to the increased dissoluteness of their superiors. And who will deny what he farther affirms—that the general conduct of high and low receives a deep tincture of depravity from the growing neglect of public worship? So far I most cordially agree with the noble author. Nothing can be more obvious, than that the disuse of public worship is

\* Hints to an Association for preventing Vice and Immorality, written by a Nobleman of the highest rank.

naturally followed by a neglect of all religious duties. Energies, which are not called out into action, almost necessarily die in the mind. The soul, no less than the body, requires its stated repairs, and regular renovations. And from the sluggish and procrastinating spirit of man, that religious duty to which no fixed time is assigned, is seldom, it is to be feared, performed at all.\*

I must, however, take leave to dissent from the opinion of the noble author, that the too common desertion of persons of rank from the service of the establishment is occasioned in general, as he intimates, by their disapprobation of the Liturgy; as it may more probably be supposed, that the far greater part of them are deterred from going to church by motives widely removed from speculative objections and conscientious scruples.

It would be quite foreign to my present

\* On this Subject see Dr. Johnson's Life of Milton.

purpose to enter upon the question of the superior utility of a form of prayer for public worship. Most sincerely attached to the establishment myself, not, as far as I am able to judge, from prejudice, but from a fixed and settled conviction; I regard its institutions with a veneration at once affectionate and rational. Never need a Christian, except when his own heart is strangely indisposed, fail to derive benefit from its ordinances, and he may bless the overruling providence of God, that, in this instance, the natural variableness and inconstancy of human opinion is, as it were, fixed, and settled, and hedged in, by a stated service so pure, so evangelical, and which is enriched by such a large infusion of sacred Scripture.

If so many among us condemn the service as having been, individually, to *us* fruitless and unprofitable, let us inquire whether the blessing may not be withheld because we are not fervent in asking it. — If we do not find a suitable humiliation in the *Con-*

*fession*, a becoming earnestness in the *Petitions*, a congenial joy in the *Adoration*, a corresponding gratitude in the *Thanksgivings*, it is because our hearts do not accompany our words; it is because we rest in “the form of godliness,” and are contented to remain destitute of its “power.” If we are not duly interested when the select portions of Scripture are read to us, it is because we do not as “new-born babes” desire the sincere milk of the word, that “we may grow thereby.”

Perhaps there has not been since the age of the Apostles, a church upon earth, in which the public worship was so solemn and so cheerful; so simple, yet so sublime; so full of fervour, at the same time so free from enthusiasm; so rich in the gold of Christian antiquity, yet so astonishingly exempt from its dross. That it has imperfections, we do not deny; but what are they compared with its general excellence? They are as the spots on the sun’s disk, which a sharp observer may detect, but which

neither diminish the warmth, nor obscure the brightness.

But if those imperfections which are inseparable from all human institutions, are to be alleged as reasons for abstaining to attend on the service of the established church; we must, on the same principle, and on still stronger grounds, abstain from all public worship whatever; and indeed it must be confessed, that the persons of whom we are now speaking, are very consistent in this matter.

But the difference of opinion from that of the noble author here intimated, is not so much about the Liturgy itself, as the imaginary effects attributed to it in thinning the pews of our people of fashion. The slightest degree of observation serves to contradict this assertion. Those however, who, with the noble author, maintain the other opinion, may satisfy their doubts by inquiring, whether the regular and systematic absentees from church are chiefly to be found among the thinking,



the reading, the speculative, and the scrupulous part of mankind.

Even the most negligent attendant on public worship must know, that the obnoxious creed, to whose malignant potency this general desertion is ascribed by the noble author, is never read above three or four Sundays in the year ; and even allowing the validity of the objections brought against it, that does not seem a very adequate reason for banishing the most scrupulous and tender consciences from church on the remaining eight-and-forty Sundays of the calendar.

Besides, there is one test which is absolutely unequivocal : this creed is never read at all in the afternoon, any more than the Litany, that other great source of offence and supposed desertion ; and yet, with all these multiplied reasons for their attendance, do we see the conscientious crowds of the high-born, who abstain from the morning service through their repugnance to subscribe to the dogmas of Athanasius, or the

more orthodox clauses of the morning Litany ; do we see them, I say, flocking to the evening service, impatient for the exercise of that devotion which had been obstructed by these two objectionable portions of the Liturgy ? Do we see them eager to explain the cause of their morning absence, and zealous to vindicate their piety by assiduously attending when the reprobated portions of divine service are omitted ? So far from it, is it not pretty evident that the general quarrel (with some few exceptions) of those who habitually absent themselves from public worship, is not with the Creed, but the Commandments ? With such, to reform the Prayer-Book would go but a little way, unless the New Testament could be also abridged. Cut, and pare, and prune the service of the Church ever so much, still that Christianity itself, which is its ground-work, will be found full of formidable objections. Should the Church even give up her abstruse creeds, it would avail but little, unless

the Bible would also expunge those rigorous laws which not only prohibit sinful actions, but corrupt inclinations. And to speak honestly, I do not see how such persons as habitually infringe the laws of virtue and sobriety, and who yet are men of acute sagacity, accustomed on other subjects to a consistent train of reasoning ; who see consequences in their causes ; who behold practical self-denial necessarily involved in the sincere habit of religious observances—I do not see how, with respect to such men, any doctrines reformed, any redundances lopped, any obscurities brightened, could effect the object of the noble author's very benevolent and christian wish.

Religious duties are often neglected upon more consistent grounds than the friends of religion are willing to allow. They are often discontinued, not as repugnant to the understanding, not as repulsive to the judgment, but as hostile to a worldly, as well as, licentious life. And when a

prudent man, after having entered into a solemn convention, finds that he is living in a constant breach of every article of the treaty he has engaged to observe, one cannot much wonder at his getting out of the hearing of the heavy artillery which he knows is planted against him, and against every one who lives in the allowed infraction of the covenant into which every Christian has solemnly entered.

For is it not obvious, that a man of sense who should acknowledge the truth of the doctrine, would find himself obliged to submit to the force of the precept? It is not easy to be a comfortable sinner, without trying, at least, to be a confirmed unbeliever. And as that cannot be achieved by a wish, the next expedient is to shun the recollection of that belief, and to forget that of which we cannot be ignorant. The smallest remains of faith would embitter a life of libertinism, and to be frequently reminded of the articles of that faith would disturb the ease induced by a

neglect of all observances. While to such a one who retains any impression of Christianity, the wildest festivals of intemperance will be converted into the terrifying feast of Damocles.

That many a respectable non-conformist is kept out of the pale of the establishment by some of the causes noticed by the noble author, cannot be questioned, and a just matter of regret it is. But these, however, are often sober thinkers, serious inquirers, conscientious reasoners, whose object we may charitably believe is truth, however they may be deceived as to its nature: but that the same objections banish the great and the gay is not equally evident. Thanks to the indolence and indifference of the times, it is not dogmas or doctrines, it is not abstract reasonings, or puzzling propositions, it is not perplexed argument, or intricate metaphysics, which can now disincline from Christianity; so far from it, they cannot even allure to unbelief. Infidelity itself, with all that strong and natural bias which

selfishness and appetite entertain in its favour, if it appear in the grave and scholastic form of speculation, argument, or philosophical deduction, may now lie almost as quietly on the shelf as the volumes of its most able antagonist; and the cobwebs are almost as seldom brushed from Hobbes as from Hooker. No prudent scepticism has wisely studied the temper of the times, and skillfully felt the pulse of this relaxed, and indolent, and selfish age. It prudently accommodated itself to the reigning character, when it adopted sarcasm instead of reasoning, and preferred a sneer to an argument. It discreetly judged, that, if it would now gain proselytes, it must shew itself under the bewitching form of a profane bon-mot; must be interwoven in the texture of some amusing history, written with the levity of a romance, and the point and glitter of an epigram: it must embellish the ample margin with some offensive anecdote or impure allusion, and decorate impiety with every loose and meretricious ornament which a

corrupt imagination can invent. It must break up the old flimsy system into little mischievous aphorisms, ready for practical purposes: it must divide the rope of sand into little portable parcels, which the shallowest wit can comprehend, and the shortest memory carry away.

Philosophy therefore (as Unbelief, by a patent of its own creation, has lately been pleased to call itself) will not do nearly so much mischief to the present age as its primitive apostles intended: since it requires time, application, and patience to peruse the reasoning-veterans of the sceptic school: and time, and application, and patience, are talents not now very severely devoted to study of any sort, by those who give the law to fashion; especially since, as it was hinted above, the same principles may be acquired on cheaper terms, and the reputation of being philosophers obtained without the sacrifice of pleasure for the severities of study; since the industry of our literary chemists has extracted the spirit from the gross substance of the old

unvendible poison, and exhibited it in the volatile essence of a few sprightly sayings.

If therefore, in this voluptuous age, when a frivolous and relaxing dissipation has infected our very studies, infidelity will not be at the pains of deep research and elaborate investigation, even on such subjects as are congenial to its affections, and promotive of its object; it is vain to expect that Christianity will be more engaging, either as an object of speculation, or as a rule of practice; since it demands a still stronger exertion of those energies which the gay world is not at the pains to exercise, even on the side they approve. For the evidences of Christianity require attention to be comprehended, no less than its doctrines require humility to be received, and its precepts self-denial to be obeyed.

Will it then be uncharitable to pronounce, that the leading mischief—not which thins our churches—for that is not the evil I propose to consider—but which pervades our whole character, and gives the colour to our general conduct, is *practical irreligion*? an



irreligion not so much opposed to a speculative faith, not so much in hostility to the evidences of christianity, as to that spirit, temper, and behaviour which christianity inculcates.

On this practical irreligion it is proposed to offer a few hints. After attempting to shew, by a comparison with the religion of the great in preceding ages, that there is a visible decline of piety among the higher ranks—that even those more liberal spirits who neglect not many of the great duties of benevolence, yet hold the severer obligations of piety in no esteem—I shall proceed, though perhaps with too little method, to remark on the notorious *effects* of the decay of this religious principle, as it corrupts our mode of education, infects domestic conduct, spreads the contagion downwards among servants and inferiors, and influences our general manners, habits, and conversation.

But what it is here proposed principally to insist on is, that this defect of religious principle is almost equally fatal, as to all

the ends and purposes of genuine piety, whether it appear in the open contempt and defiance of all sacred institutions, or whether it shield itself under the more decent veil of external observances; unsupported by such a conduct as is analogous to the christian profession.

I shall proceed with a few remarks on a third class of fashionable characters, who profess to acknowledge christianity as a perfect system of morals, while they deny its divine authority: and conclude with some slight animadversions on the opinion which these modish christians maintain, that morality is the whole of religion.

It must be confessed, however, that manners and principles act reciprocally on each other; and are, by turns, cause, and effect. For instance—the increased relaxation of morals produces the increased neglect of infusing religious principles in the education of youth: which effect becomes, in its turn, a cause; and in due time, when that cause comes to operate, helps on the decline of manners.

## CHAPTER I.

*Decline of Christianity shewn, by a comparative View of the Religion of the Great in preceding Ages.*

IF the general position of this little tract be allowed, namely, that religion is at present in no very flourishing state among those whose example, from the high ground on which they stand, guides and governs the rest of mankind, it will not be denied by those who are ever so superficially acquainted with the history of our country, that this has not always been the case. Those who are able to make a fair comparison must allow, that however the present age may be improved in other important and valuable advantages, yet that there is but little appearance remaining among the great and the powerful of that "righteousness which exalteth a nation;"—They must confess that there has been a *moral revolu-*

*tion* in the national manners and principles, very little analogous to that great *political* one which we hear so much and so justly extolled. That our public virtue bears little proportion to our public blessings; and that our religion has decreased in a pretty exact proportion to our having secured the means of enjoying it.

That the antipodes to wrong are hardly ever right, was very strikingly illustrated about the middle of the last century, when the fiery and indiscreet zeal of one party was made a pretext for the profligate impiety of the other; who, to the bad principle which dictated a depraved conduct, added the bad taste of being proud of it:—when even the least abandoned were absurdly apprehensive that an appearance of decency might subject them to the charge of fanaticism, a charge in which they took care to involve real piety as well as enthusiastic pretence, till it became the general fashion to avoid no sin but hypocrisy, to dread no imputation but that of seriousness,

and to be more afraid of the virtues which procure a good reputation than of every vice which ever earned a bad one. Party was no longer confined to political distinctions, but became a part of morals, and was carried into religion itself. The more profligate of the court party began to connect the idea of devotion with that of republicanism; and to prove their aversion to the one, thought they could never cast too much ridicule upon the other. The public taste became debauched; to be licentious in principle, was thought by many to be the best way of making their court to the restored Monarch; open corruption was adopted by way of proving their abhorrence of the hypocritical side; and *Poems by a person of honour*, the phrase of the day to designate a fashionable author, were often scandalous offences against modesty and virtue.

It was not till piety was thus unfortunately brought into disrepute, that persons of condition thought it made their sincerity,

their abilities, or their good breeding questionable, to appear openly on the side of religion. A strict attachment to piety did not subtract from a great reputation. Men were not thought the worse lawyers, generals, ministers, legislators, or historians, for believing, and even defending, the religion of their country. The gallant Sir Philip Sidney, the rash but heroic Essex, the politic and sagacious Burleigh, the accomplished Falkland,\* not only publicly owned their belief in christianity, but even wrote some things of a religious nature.† These instances, and many others which might be aduced, are not, it will be allowed, selected from among contemplative recluses, grave divines, or authors by profession; but from the busy, the active, and the illustrious; from public characters, from men of

\* Lord Falkland assisted the great Chillingworth in his incomparable work, *The Religion of a Protestant*.

† See that equally elegant and authentic work, *The Anecdotes of Royal and Noble Authors*.

strong passions, beset with great temptations; distinguished actors on the stage of life; and whose respective claims to the title of fine gentlemen, brave soldiers, or able statesmen, have never been called in question.

What would the Hales, and the Clarendons, and the Somerses\* have said, had they been told that the time was at no great distance when that sacred book, for which they thought it no derogation from their wisdom or their dignity to entertain the profoundest reverence; the book which they made the rule of their faith, the object of their most serious study, and the foundation of their eternal hope; that this book would one day be of little more use to men in high public stations, than to be the instrument of an oath; and that the

\* This consummate statesman was not only remarkable for a strict attendance on the public duties of religion, but for maintaining them with equal exactness in his family, at a period too when religion was most discountenanced.

sublimest rites of the christian religion would soon be considered as little more than a necessary qualification for a place, or the legal preliminary to an office?

This indeed is the boasted period of free enquiry and liberty of thinking. But it is the peculiar character of the present age, that its mischiefs often assume the most alluring forms; and that the most alarming evils not only look so like goodness as to be often mistaken for it, but are sometimes mixed up with so much real good, as often to disguise, though never to counteract, their malignity. Under the beautiful mask of an enlightened philosophy, all religious restraints are set at nought; and some of the deadliest wounds have been aimed at christianity, in works written in avowed vindication of the most amiable of all the christian principles.\* Even the prevalence

\* See particularly *Voltaire sur la Tolerance*. This is a common artifice of that insidious author. In this instance he has made use of the popularity he obtained in the fanatical tragedy at Thoulouse, (the



of a liberal and warm philanthropy is secretly sapping the foundation of christian morals, because many of its champions allow themselves to live in the open violation of the severer duties of justice and sobriety, while they are contending for the gentler ones of charity and beneficence.

The strong and generous bias in favour of universal toleration, noble as the principle itself is, has engendered a dangerous notion that all error is innocent. Whether it be owing to this or to whatever other cause, it is certain that the discriminating features of the christian religion are every day growing into less repute; and it is become the fashion even among the better

murder of Calas) to discredit, though in the most guarded manner, christianity itself; degrading martyrdoms, denying the truth of the Pagan persecutions, &c. &c. And by mixing some truths with many falsehoods, by assuming an amiable candour, and professing to serve the interest of goodness, he treacherously contrives to leave on the mind of the unguarded reader impressions the most unfavourable to christianity.

sort, to evade, to lower, or to generalize, its most distinguishing peculiarities.

There is so little of the Author of christianity left in his own religion, that an apprehensive believer is ready to exclaim with the woman at the sepulchre, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." The locality of Hell and the existence of an Evil Spirit are annihilated, or considered as abstract ideas, as Metaphors, as Allegories. When they are alluded to, it is periphrastically. They are discontinued not on the ground of their being awful and terrible, but they are set aside as topics too vulgar for the polished, too illiberal for the learned, and as savouring too much of credulity for the enlightened.

While we justly glory in having freed ourselves from the trammels of human authority, are we not turning our liberty into licentiousness, and wantonly struggling to throw off the *divine* authority too? Freedom of thought is the glory of the human

mind ; while it is confined within its just and sober limits ; but though we may think ourselves accountable for *opinions* at no earthly tribunal, yet it should be remembered, that thoughts as well as actions are amenable at the bar of God. Though we may rejoice that the tyranny of the spiritual Procrustes is so far annihilated, that we are in no danger of having our opinions lopped or lengthened till they are brought to fit the measure of human caprice, yet there is still a standard by which not only actions are weighed, but opinions are judged ; and every sentiment which is clearly inconsistent with the revealed will of God, is as much throwing off *his* dominion as the breach of any of his moral precepts. This cuts up by the roots that popular and independent phrase, that “ thoughts are free ;” for in this view we are no more at liberty to indulge opinions in opposition to the express word of God than we are at liberty to infringe practically on his commandments.

There is then surely one test by which it is no mark of intolerance to try the principles of men, namely, the *Law and the Testimony* : and on applying to this touchstone, it is impossible not to lament, that, while a more generous spirit governs our judgment, a purer principle does not seem to regulate our lives. May it not be said, that, while we are justly commended for thinking charitably of the opinions of others, we seem, in return, as if we were desirous of furnishing them with an opportunity of exercising their candour by the laxity of principle in which we indulge ourselves ? If the hearts of men were as firmly united to each other by the bond of charity as some pretend, they could not fail of being united to God also by one common principle of piety. For christian piety furnishes the only certain source of all charitable judgment, as well as of all virtuous conduct.

Instead of abiding by the salutary precept

of *judging no man*, it is the fashion to exceed our commission, and to fancy every body to be in a safe state. "Judge not" is the precise limit of our rule. This rule furnishes no more encouragement to judge falsely on the side of worldly candour, than to judge harshly on the side of Christian charity. In forming our notions we have to chuse between the bible and the world, between the rule and the practice. Where these do not agree, it is left to the judgment of believers, at least, by which we are to decide. But we never act, in religious concerns, by the same rule of common sense and equitable judgment which governs us on other occasions. In weighing any commodity, its weight is determined by some generally allowed standard; and if the commodity be heavier or lighter than the standard weight, we add to or take from it: but we never break, or clip, or reduce the weight to suit the thing we are weighing; because the common consent of mankind has agreed that the one shall be considered as the standard to ascertain the

value of the other. But, in weighing our principles by the standard of the Gospel, we do just the reverse. Instead of bringing our opinions and actions to the *balance of the sanctuary* in order to determine and rectify their comparative deficiencies, we lower and reduce the standard of the scripture doctrines till we have accomodated them to our own purposes : so that, instead of trying others and ourselves by God's unerring rule, we invert the order of things, we try the truth of God's rule by its conformity or non-conformity to our own depraved notions and corrupt practices.

## CHAPTER II.

*Benevolence allowed to be the reigning Virtue, but not exclusively the Virtue of the present Age.—Benevolence not the whole of Religion, though one of its most characteristic Features. Whether Benevolence proceeds from a Religious Principle, will be more infallibly known by the general Disposition of Time, Fortune, and the common Habits of Life, than from a few occasional Acts of Bounty.*

To all the remonstrance and invective of the preceding chapter, there will not fail to be opposed that which we hear every day so loudly insisted on,—the decided superiority of the present age in other and better respects. It will be said, that even those who neglect the outward forms of religion, exhibit however the best proofs of the best principles; that the unparalleled instances of charity of which we are continual witnesses; that the many striking

acts of public bounty, and the various new and noble improvements in this shining virtue, justly entitle the present age to be called, by way of eminence, *the age of benevolence*.

It is with the liveliest joy I acknowledge the delightful truth. Liberality flows with a full tide through a thousand channels. There is scarcely a newspaper but records some meeting of men of fortune for the most salutary purposes. The noble and numberless structures for the relief of distress, which are the ornament and the glory of our metropolis, proclaim a species of munificence unknown to former ages. Subscriptions, not only to hospitals, but to various other valuable institutions, are obtained almost as soon as solicited. And who but must wish that these beautiful monuments of benevolence may become every day more numerous, and more extended!

Yet, with all these allowed and obvious excellencies, it is not quite clear whether something too much has not been said of the liberality of the present age, in a com-



parative view with that of those ages which preceded it. A general alteration of habits and manners has at the same time multiplied public bounties and private distress; and it is scarcely a paradox, to say that there was probably less misery when there was less munificence.

If an increased benevolence now ranges through, and relieves a wider compass of distress; yet still, if those examples of luxury and dissipation which promote that distress are still *more* increased, this makes the good done bear little proportion to the evil promoted. If the miseries *removed* by the growth of charity fall, both in number and weight, far below those which are *caused* by the growth of vice and disorder; if we find that, though bounty is extended, yet those corruptions which make bounty so necessary are extended also, almost beyond calculation; if it appear that, though more objects are relieved by our money, yet incomparably more are debauched by our licentious habits—the balance perhaps

will not turn out so decidedly in favour of the times as we are willing to imagine.

If then the most valuable species of charity is that which prevents distress by preventing or lessening vice, the greatest and most inevitable cause of want,—we ought not so highly to exalt the bounty of the great in the present day, in preference to that broad shade of protection, patronage, and maintenance, which the wide-spread bounty of their forefathers stretched out over whole villages, I had almost said whole provinces. When a few noblemen in a county, like their own stately oaks (paternal oaks! which were not often set upon a card) extended their sheltering branches to shield all the underwood of the forest—when there existed a kind of passive charity, a negative sort of benevolence, which did good of itself; and without effort, exertion, or expence, produced the effect of all, and performed the best functions of bounty, though it did not aspire to the dignity of its name—it was simply this:—*great people*

*staid at home* ; and the sober pomp and orderly magnificence of a noble family, residing at their own castle great part of the year, contributed in the most natural way to the maintenance of the poor, by employing them ; and in a good degree *prevented* that distress, which it must however thankfully be confessed it is the laudable object of modern bounty to *relieve*. A man of fortune might not then, it is true, so often dine in public for the benefit of the poor ; but the poor were more regularly and comfortably fed with the abundant crumbs which then fell from the rich man's table. Whereas it cannot be denied that the prevailing mode of living has pared real hospitality to the very quick ; and, though the remark may be thought ridiculous, it is a material disadvantage to the poor that the introduction of the modern unsubstantial style of luxury has rendered the remains of the most costly table but of small value.

But even allowing the boasted superiority of modern benevolence, still it will not be

inconsistent with the object of the present design, to enquire whether the diffusion of this branch of charity, though the most lovely offspring of religion, be yet any positive proof of the prevalence of religious principle? and whether it be not the fashion rather to consider Benevolence as a substitute for Christianity than as an evidence of it?

It seems to be one of the reigning errors among the better sort, to reduce all religion into benevolence, and all benevolence into alms-giving. The wide and comprehensive idea of Christian charity is compressed into the slender compass of a little pecuniary relief. This species of benevolence is indeed a bright gem among the ornaments of a Christian; but by no means furnishes all the jewels of his crown, which derives its lustre from the associated radiance of every christian grace. Besides, the genuine virtues are all of the same family; and it is only by being seen in company with each other, and with Piety their common parent, that they are certainly known to be legitimate.

But it is the property of the *christian* virtues, that, like all other amiable members of the same family, while each is doing its own particular duty, it is contributing to the prosperity of the rest; and the larger the family, the better they live together, as no one can advance itself, without labouring for the advancement of the whole: thus, no man can be benevolent on christian principles without self-denial; and so of the other virtues: each is connected with some other, and all with religion.

I already anticipate the obvious and hackneyed reply, that “ whoever be the instrument, and whatever be the motive of bounty, still the poor are equally relieved, and therefore the end is the same.” And it must be confessed that those compassionate hearts, who cannot but be earnestly anxious that the distressed should be relieved at any rate, should not too scrupulously enquire in the case of others, into any cause, of which the effect is so beneficial. Nor indeed will candour scrutinize

too curiously into the lesser errors of any life of which benevolence will always be allowed to be the shining ornament, while it does not pretend to be the atoning virtue.

Let me not be misrepresented, as if I were seeking to detract from the value of this amiable feeling; we do not surely lower the practice by seeking to ennoble the principle; the action will not be impaired by mending the motive: and no one will be likely to give the poor less because he seeks to please God more.

One cannot then help wishing that pecuniary bounty were not only not practised, but that it were not sometimes enjoined too, as a redeeming virtue. In many conversations (I had almost said in many charity sermons) it is insinuated as if a little almsgiving could pay off old scores contracted by favourite indulgences. This, though often done by well-meaning men to advance the interests of some present pious purpose, yet has the mischievous effect of

those medicines which, while they may relieve a local complaint, are yet undermining the general habit.

That great numbers who are not influenced by so high a principle as Christianity holds out, are yet truly compassionate without hypocrisy and without ostentation, who can doubt? But who that feels the beauty of benevolence can avoid being solicitous, not only that its offerings should comfort the receiver, but return in blessings to the bosom of the giver, by springing from such motives, and being accompanied by such a temper as shall redound to his eternal good! For that the benefit is the same to the object, whatever be the character of the benefactor, is but an uncomfortable view of things to a real Christian, whose compassion reaches to the souls of men. Such a one longs to see the charitable giver as happy himself, as he is endeavouring to make the object of his bounty; but such a one knows that no happiness can

be fully and finally enjoyed but on the solid basis of Christian piety.

For as religion is not, on the one hand, merely an opinion or a sentiment, so neither is it, on the other, merely an act or a performance; but it is a disposition, a habit, a temper: it is not a name, but a nature: it is a turning the whole mind to God: it is a concentration of all the powers and affections of the soul into one steady point, an uniform desire to please *Him*. This desire will naturally and necessarily manifest itself in our doing all the good we can to our fellow-creatures in every possible way; for it will be found that neither of the two parts into which practical religion is divided, can be performed with any degree of perfection but by those who unite both: as it may be questioned if any man really *does* "love his neighbour as himself," who does not first endeavour to "love God with all "his heart." As genius has been defined to be strong general powers of mind, accidentally determined to some particular pur-



suit, so piety may be denominated a strong general disposition of the heart to every thing that is right, breaking forth into every excellent action, as the occasion presents itself. The temper must be ready in the mind, and the whole heart must by its internal principle, be prepared and trained to every act of virtue to which it may be called out. For religious principles are like the military exercise : they keep up an habitual state of preparation for actual service ; and, by never relaxing the discipline, the real Christian is ready for every duty to which he may be commanded. Right actions best prove the existence of religion in the heart ; but they are evidences, not causes.

Whether therefore a man's charitable actions proceed from religious principle, he will be best able to ascertain by scrutinizing into his own habits of self denial, by marking what is the general disposition of his time and fortune, and by observing whether his pleasures and expences are

habitually regulated with a view to enable him to be more or less useful to others.

It is in vain that he possess\* what is called by the courtesy of fashion *the best heart in the world* (a character we every day hear applied to the libertine and the prodigal) if he squander his time and estate in such a round of extravagant indulgences and thoughtless dissipation as leaves him little money and less leisure for nobler purposes. It makes but little difference whether a man is prevented from doing good by hard-hearted parsimony or an unprincipled extravagance ; the stream of usefulness is equally cut off by both.

The mere *casual* benevolence of any man can have little claim to solid esteem ; nor does any charity deserve the name, which does not grow out of a steady conviction that it is his bounden duty ; which does not spring from a settled propensity to obey the whole will of God ; which is not therefore made a part of the general plan of his conduct ; and which does not lead him to

order the whole scheme of his affairs with an eye to it.

He therefore who does not habituate himself to certain interior restraints, who does not live in a regular course of self-renunciation, will not be likely often to perform acts of beneficence, when it becomes necessary to convert to such purposes any of that time or money which appetite, temptation, or vanity solicits him to divert to other purposes.

And surely he who seldom sacrifices one darling indulgence, who does not subtract one gratification from the incessant round of his enjoyments, when the indulgence would obstruct his capacity of doing good, or when the sacrifice would enlarge his power, does not deserve the name of *benevolent*. And for such an unequivocal criterion of charity, to whom are we to look but to the conscientious Christian? No other spirit but that by which he is governed can subdue self-love: and where self-love is the predominant passion, bene-

volence can have but a feeble, or an accidental dominion.

Now if we look around, and remark the excesses of luxury, the costly diversions, and the intemperate dissipation in which numbers of professing Christians indulge themselves, can any stretch of candour, can even that tender sentiment by which we are enjoined "to hope" and to "believe all things," enable us to hope and believe that such are actuated by a spirit of Christian benevolence, merely because we see them perform some casual acts of charity, which the spirit of the world can contrive to make extremely compatible with a voluptuous life ; and the cost of which, after all, bears but little proportion to that of any one vice, or even vanity !

Men will not believe that there is hardly any one human good quality which will know and keep its proper bounds, without the restraining influence of religious principle. There is, for instance, great danger lest a constant attention to so right a prac-

tice as an invariable œconomy, should narrow the heart and incline it to the love of money. Nothing can effectually counteract this natural propensity but the Christian habit of devoting those retrenched expences to some good purpose; and then œconomy, instead of narrowing the heart, will enlarge it, by inducing a constant association of benevolence with frugality. An habitual attention to the wants of others is the only wholesome regulator of our own expences; and carries with it a whole train of virtues, disinterestedness, sobriety, and temperance. And those who live in the custom of levying constant taxes on their vanities for such purposes, serve the poor still less than they serve themselves. For if they are charitable upon true Christian principles, “they are laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.”

Thus when a vein of Christianity runs through the whole mass of a man's life, it gives a new value to all his actions, and a

new character to all his views. It transmutes prudence and œconomy into Christian virtues ; and every offering that is presented on the altar of charity becomes truly consecrated, when it is the gift of obedience, and the price of self-denial. Piety is that fire from heaven that can alone kindle the sacrifice, which through the mediation and intercession of our great High Priest “ will “ go up for a memorial before God.”

On the other hand, when any act of bounty is performed by way of composition with our Maker, either as a purchase or an expiation of unallowed indulgences ; though, even in this case, God, (who makes all the passions of men subservient to his good purposes) can make the gift equally beneficial to the receiver, yet it is surely not too severe to say, that to the giver such acts are an unfounded dependence, a deceitful refuge, a broken staff.



## CHAPTER III.

*The Neglect of Religious Education, both a Cause and a Consequence of the Decline of Christianity.—No Moral Restraints.—Religion only incidentally taught, not as a Principle of Action. A few of the many Causes which dispose the Young to entertain low Opinions of Religion.*

LET not the truly pious be offended, as if, in the present chapter, which is intended to treat of the notorious neglect of Religious Education, I meant to insinuate that the principles and tempers of Christianity may be formed in the young mind, by the mere mechanical operation of early institution, without the co-operating aid of the Holy Spirit of God. To imply this would be indeed to betray a lamentable ignorance of human nature, of the disorder that sin has introduced, of the inefficacy of mere human means; and entirely to mis-

take the genius, and overlook the most obvious and important truths of our holy religion.

It must however be allowed, that the supreme Being works chiefly by means ; and though it be confessed that no defect of education, no corruption of manners can place any out of the reach of the Divine influences, (for it is under such circumstances perhaps that some of the most extraordinary instances of Divine grace have been manifested) yet it must be owned, that instructing children in principles of religion, and giving them early habits of temperance and piety, is the way in which we may most confidently expect the Divine blessing. And that it is a work highly pleasing to God, and which will be most assuredly accompanied by his gracious energy, we may judge from what he says of his faithful servant Abraham ; “ I *know* him that he will  
“ command his children, and his house-  
“ hold after him, and they shall keep the  
“ way of the Lord.”



But religion is the only thing in which we seem to look for the end, without making use of the means; and yet it would not be more surprising if we were to expect that our children should become artists and scholars without being bred to arts and languages, than it is to look for a Christian world, without a Christian education.

The noblest objects can yield no delight, if there be not in the mind a disposition to relish them. There must be a congruity between the mind and the object, in order to produce any capacity of enjoyment. To the Mathematician, demonstration is pleasure; to the Philosopher, the study of nature; to the Voluptuary, the gratification of his appetite; to the Poet, pleasures of the imagination. These objects they each respectively pursue, as pleasures adapted to that part of their nature which they have been accustomed to indulge and cultivate.

Now as men will be apt to act consistently with their general views and habitual ten-

dencies, would it not be absurd to expect that the philosopher should look for his sovereign good at a ball, or the sensualist in the pleasures of intellect or piety? None of these ends are answerable to the general views of the respective pursuer; they are not correspondent to his ideas; they are not commensurate to his aims. The sublimest pleasures can afford little gratification where a taste for them has not been previously formed. A clown, who should hear a scholar or an artist talk of the delights of a library, a picture-gallery or a concert, could not guess at the nature of the pleasures they afford; nor would his being introduced to them give him much clearer ideas; because he would bring to them an eye blind to proportion, an understanding new to science, and an ear deaf to harmony.

Shall we expect then, since men can only become scholars by diligent labor, that they shall become Christians by mere chance? Shall we be surprised if those do not fulfil the offices of religion, who are not trained

to an acquaintance with them? And will it not be obvious that it must be some other thing besides the abstruseness of creeds, which has tended to make Christianity unfashionable, and piety obsolete?

It probably will not be disputed, that in no age have the passions of our high-born youth been so early freed from all curb and restraint. In no age has the paternal authority been so contemptuously treated, or every species of subordination so disdainfully trampled upon. In no age have simple, and natural, and youthful pleasures so early lost their power over the mind; nor was ever one great secret of virtue and happiness, the secret of being *cheaply pleased*, so little understood.

A taste for costly, or artificial, or tumultuous pleasures cannot be gratified, even by their most sedulous pursuers, at every moment; and what wretched management is it in the œconomy of human happiness, so to contrive, as that the enjoyment shall be rare and difficult, and the intervals long

and languid ! Whereas real and unadulterated pleasures occur perpetually to him who cultivates a taste for truth and nature, and science and virtue. But these simple and tranquil enjoyments cannot but be insipid to him whose passions have been prematurely stimulated by agitating pleasures, or whose taste has been depraved by such as are debasing and frivolous ; for it is of more consequence to virtue than some good people are willing to allow, to preserve the taste pure, and the judgment sound. A vitiated intellect has no small connection with depraved morals.

Since amusements of some kind are necessary to all ages—I speak now with an eye to mere human enjoyment—why should it not be an object of early care, to keep a due proportion of them in reserve for those future seasons of life, in which they will be so much more needed ? Why should there not, even for this purpose, be adopted a system of salutary restriction, to be used by parents toward their children, by in-

structors toward their pupils, and in the progress of life by each man toward himself? In a word, why should not the same reasons, which have induced us to tether inferior animals, suggest the expediency of, in some sort, tethering man also? Since nothing but experience seems to teach him, that if he be allowed to anticipate his future possessions, and trample all the flowery fields of real, as well as those of imaginary and artificial enjoyment, he not only endures present disgust, but defaces and destroys all the rich materials of his future happiness ; and leaves himself, for the rest of his life, nothing but ravaged fields and barren stubble.

But the great and radical defect, and that which comes more immediately within the present design, seems to be, that in general the characteristical principles of Christianity are not early and strongly infused into the mind : that religion, if taught at all, is rather taught incidentally, as a thing of subordinate value, than as the leading prin-

ciple of human actions, the great animating spring of human conduct. Were the high influential principles of the Christian religion anxiously and early inculcated, we should find that those lapses from virtue, to which passion and temptation afterwards too frequently solicit, would be more easily recoverable.

For though the evil propensities of fallen nature, and the bewitching allurements of pleasure, will too often seduce even those of the best education into devious paths, yet we shall find that men will seldom be *incurably* wicked unless that internal corruption of principle has taken place, which teaches them how to justify iniquity by argument, and to confirm evil conduct by the sanction of false reasoning ; or where there is a total ignorance of the very nature and design of Christianity, which ignorance can only exist where early religious instruction has been entirely neglected.

The errors occasioned by the violence of passion may be reformed, but systematic

wickedness will be only fortified by time ; and no decrease of strength, no decay of appetite, can weaken the power of a pernicious principle. He who deliberately commits a bad action, puts himself indeed out of the path of safety ; but he who adopts a false principle, not only throws himself into the enemy's country, but burns the ships, breaks the bridge, cuts off every retreat by which he might hope one day to return into his own.

It is remarkable, that in almost all the celebrated characters of whom we have an account in former periods of the English History, we find a serious attention to religion discovering itself at the close of life, however the preceding years might unhappily have been misemployed. We meet with striking examples of this kind amongst statesmen, amongst philosophers, amongst men of business, and even amongst men of pleasure. We have on record the dying sentiments of *Walsingham*, of *Smith*, of *Hatton*, the favourites of Queen Eliza-

beth. We see, in the following reign, *Raleigh*, supporting himself by religion under the severity of his fate ; *Bacon* seeking comfort in devotion amidst his disgraces ; and *Wotton*, after having been ambassador to almost every court in Europe, taking refuge at last in a pious retirement at Eton College. But to enumerate instances would be endless, when, in fact, we scarcely discover a single instance to the contrary. In those times, it was considered as a matter even of common decency, that advanced age should possess, at least, the exterior of piety ; and we have every reasons to believe that an irreligious old man would have been pointed at as a sort of monster.

But is this the case in our day ? Do we now commonly perceive in any rank that disposition to close life religiously, which at the period to which I have alluded was so general even in the fashionable world ? I fear it is so far the reverse, that if Pope had been our contemporary, and were now



composing his famous Ethical Poem, he could not hazard even that light remark,

That beads and prayer-books are the toys of age,

without grossly violating probability.

But to what cause are we to ascribe that superannuated impiety, which seems to distinguish the present from the preceding generations? Is it not chiefly owing to the neglect of early religious instruction, which now for so many years has been gaining ground among us? In the last age even public schools were places, no less of Christian than of classical institution: and the omission of religious worship, whether public or private, was deemed, at least, as censurable a fault as the neglect of a lesson. Parents had not yet imbibed that maxim of modern refinement, that religious instruction ought to be deferred until the mind be capable of chusing for itself—that is, until it be so pre-occupied as to leave neither room nor relish for the articles of Christian faith, or the rules of Christian

obedience. The advice of the wise king of Israël of "training up a child in the way " he should go," had not then become obsolete; and the truth of his assertion, in the remaining clause of the passage, was happily realised in the sincere, though late, return of many a wanderer.

Even in the very laws of our nature, there seems to be a gracious provision for promoting the final efficacy of early religious instruction. When the old man has no longer any relish left for his accustomed gratifications, in what way does he endeavour to fill up the void? Is it not by sending back his thoughts to his early years, and endeavouring to live over again in idea those scenes which, in his distant retrospect, appear far more delightful than he had found them to be at the actual period of enjoyment? Disgusted at every thing around him, and disappointed in those pursuits to which he had once looked forward with all the ardour of hope; but to which he now feels he has sacrificed in vain, his

quiet, and perhaps his integrity, he takes a pensive pleasure in reviewing the season, when his mind was yet cheerful and innocent; and even the very cares and anxieties of that happy period appear to him now, in a more captivating form than any pleasures he can yet hope to enjoy. What then is more natural, I had almost said more certain, than that if the principles of religion were inculcated, and the feelings of devotion excited in his mind in that most susceptible season of life, they should now revive as well as other contemporary impressions, and present themselves in a point of view, the more interesting, because, while all other instances of youthful occupation can be only *recollected*, those may be called up into fresh existence, and be enjoyed even more perfectly than before.

The defects of memory also, which old age induces, will, in this instance, assist rather than obstruct. It almost universally happens, that the more recent transactions

are those soonest forgotten, while the events of youth and childhood are remembered with accuracy. If therefore pious principles have been implanted, they will, even by the course of nature, be recollected, while those things which most contributed to hinder their growth, are swept from the memory. What a powerful encouragement then does this consideration afford ! or rather what an indispensable obligation does it lay upon parents, to store the minds of their children with the seeds of piety ! And on the other hand, what unnatural barbarity is it, irretrievably to shut up this last refuge of the wretched, by a neglect of this duty ; and to render it impossible for those who had “ stood all the day idle,” to be called, at least without a miracle, which the negligent has little right to expect, even at the eleventh hour !

No one surely will impute to bigotry or enthusiasm, the lamenting, or even remonstrating against such desperate negligence ;

nor can it be deemed illiberal to inquire, Whether even a still greater evil does not exist? I mean, whether pernicious principles are not as strenuously inculcated as those of real virtue and happiness are discountenanced? Whether young men are not expressly taught to take custom and fashion as the ultimate and exclusive standard by which to try their principles and to weigh their actions? Whether some idol of false honour be not consecrated and set up for them to worship? Whether, even among the better sort, reputation be not held out as a motive of sufficient energy to produce virtue, in a world where yet the greatest vices are every day practised openly, without at all obstructing the reception of those who practise them into the best company? Whether resentment be not ennobled; and pride, and many other passions, erected into honourable virtues—virtues not less repugnant to the genius and spirit of Christianity than obvious and gross vices? Will it be thought impertinent to enquire if the awful

doctrines of a perpetually present Deity, a future righteous judgment, and a tremendous responsibility, are early impressed and lastingly engraven on the hearts and consciences of our high-born youth?

Perhaps, if there be any one particular in which we fall remarkably below the politer nations of antiquity, it is in that part of education which has a reference to purity of mind, and the discipline of the heart.

The great secret of religious education, which seems banished from the present practice, consists in training young men to an habitual interior restraint, an early government of the affections, and a course of self-controul over those tyrannizing inclinations which have so natural a tendency to enslave the human heart. Without this habit of moral restraint, which is one of the fundamental laws of Christian virtue, though men may, from natural temper, often *do* good, yet it is impossible that they should ever *be* good. Without the vigor-

ous exercise of this controlling principle, the best dispositions and the most amiable qualities will go but a little way towards establishing a virtuous character. For the best dispositions will be easily overcome by the concurrence of passion within, and temptation without, in a heart where the passions have not been accustomed to this wholesome discipline; and the most amiable qualities will but more easily betray their possessor, unless the heart be fortified by repeated acts and long habits of resistance.

In this, as in various other instances, we may blush at the superiority of Pagan institution. Were the Roman youth taught to imagine themselves always in the awful presence of Cato, in order to habituate them betimes to suppress base sentiments, and to excite such as were generous and noble? And should not the Christian youth be continually reminded, that a greater than Cato is here? Should they not be trained to the habit of acting under the constant impression, that *He* to whom

they must one day be accountable for intentions, as well as words and actions, is witness to the one as well as the other? that he not only is "about their path," but "understands their very thoughts?"

Were the disciples of a Pagan\* leader taught that it was a motive sufficient to compel their obedience to any rule, whether they liked it or not, that it had the authority of their teacher's name? were the bare words, *the master hath said it*, sufficient to settle all disputes, and to subdue all reluctance? And shall the scholars of a more divine teacher, who have a code of laws written by God himself, be contented with a lower rule, or abide by a meaner authority? And is any argument drawn from human considerations likely to operate more forcibly on a dependant being, indebted to the Almighty for life, and breath, and all things, than that simple but grand assertion, with which so many of

\* Pythagoras.



the precepts of our religion are introduced—  
Because, THUS SAITH THE LORD?

It is doing but little, in the infusion of first principles, to obtain the bare assent of the understanding to the existence of one Supreme Power, unless the heart and affections go along with the conviction, by our conceiving of that power as intimately connected with ourselves. A feeling temper will be but little affected with the cold idea of a *geometrical* God, as the excellent Pascal expresses it, who merely adjusts all the parts of matter, and keeps the elements in order. Such a mind will be but little moved, unless he be taught to consider his Maker under the interesting and endearing representation which revealed religion gives of him. That “God is,” will be to him rather an alarming than a consolatory idea; till he be persuaded of the subsequent proposition, that “he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Nay, if natural religion *does* even acknowledge one awful attribute,

that "God is just," it will only increase the terror of a tender conscience, till it be learned from the fountain of truth, that he is "the Justifier of him who believeth in "Jesus."

But if the great sanctions of our religion are not deeply engraven on the heart, where shall we look for any other adequate curb to the fiery spirit of youth? For, let the elements be ever so kindly mixed in a human composition, let the natural temper be ever so amiable, still whenever a man ceases to think himself an accountable being, what motive can he have for resisting a strong temptation to a present good, when he has no dread that he shall thereby forfeit a greater future good?

It may perhaps be objected, that this deep sense of religion would interfere with the general purpose of education, which is designed to qualify men for the business of human life, and not to train up a race of monks and ascetics.

There is however so little real solidity in

this specious objection, that I am firmly persuaded, that if religious principles were more deeply impressed on the heart, even the things of this world would be much better carried on. For where are we to look for all the qualities which constitute the man of business; for punctuality, diligence, and application, for such attention in doing every thing in its proper day, (the great hinge on which business turns,) as among men of principle? Economy of time, truth in observing his word, never daring to deceive or to disappoint—these form the very essence of an active and an useful character; and for these to whom shall we most naturally look? Who is so little likely to be “slothful in business” as he who is “fervent in spirit?” And will not he be most regular in dealing with men, who is most diligent in “serving the Lord?”

But, it may be said, allowing that religion does not necessarily spoil a man of business, yet it would effectually defeat

those accomplishments, and counteract that fine breeding, which essentially constitute the *gentleman*.

This again is so far from being a natural consequence, that, supposing all the other real advantages of parts, education, and society, to be equally taken into the account, there is no doubt but that, in point of true politeness, a real Christian would beat the world at its own weapons, the world itself being judge.

It must be confessed that, in the present corrupt state of things, there is scarcely any one contrivance for which we are more obliged to the inventions of mankind than for that of politeness, as there is perhaps no screen in the world which hides so many ugly sights. Yet while we allow that there never was so admirable a substitute for real goodness as good breeding, it is certain that the principles of Christianity put into action, would of themselves produce more genuine politeness than any maxims drawn from motives of human vanity, desire of ad-

miration, or worldly convenience. If *love, peace, joy, long suffering, gentleness, patience, goodness, and meekness*, may be thought instruments to produce sweetness of manners, these we are expressly told are “the fruits of the “spirit.” If mourning with the afflicted, rejoicing with the happy; if to “esteem others better than ourselves;” if “to take the lowest room;” if “not to seek “our own;” if “not to behave ourselves “unseemly; if “not to speak great swelling words of vanity”—if these are amiable, engaging, and polite parts of behaviour, then would the documents of Saint Paul make as true a fine gentleman as the *Courtier of Castiglione*, or even the *Letters of Lord Chesterfield* himself. Then would simulation, and dissimulation, and all the nice shades and delicate gradations of passive and active deceit, be rendered superfluous; and the affections of every heart be won by a shorter and a surer way than by the elegant obliquities of this late popular preceptor, whose mischiefs have

outlived his reputation; and who, notwithstanding the present just declension of his fame, greatly contributed, during its transient meridian, to relax the general nerve of virtue, and who has left a taint upon the public morals, of which we are still sensible.

That self-abasement then, which is inseparable from true Christianity, the external signs of which good-breeding knows so well how to assume; and those charities which suggest invariable kindness to others, even in the smallest things, would, if left to their natural workings, produce that gentleness which it is one great object of a polite education to imitate. They would produce it too without effort and without exertion; for being inherent in the substance, it would naturally discover itself on the surface.

For however useful the institutions of polished society may be found, yet they can never alter the eternal difference between right and wrong, or convert appear-

ances into realities ; they cannot transform decency into virtue, nor make politeness pass for principle. And the advocates for fashionable breeding should be humbled to reflect, that every convention of artificial manners was adopted not to *cure*, but to *conceal*, deformity : that though the superficial civilities of elegant life tend to make this corrupt world a more tolerable place than it would be without them, yet they never will be considered as a substitute for truth, nor a commutation for virtue, by HIM who is to pass the definitive sentence on the characters of men.

Among the many prejudices which the young and the gay entertain against religion, one is, that it is the declared enemy to wit and genius. But, says one of its wittiest champions,\* “ Piety enjoins no “ man to be dull :” and it will be found, on a fair enquiry, that though it cannot be denied that irreligion has had able men for

\* Dr. South.

its advocates, yet they have never been the *most* able. Nor can any learned profession, any department in letters or in science, produce a champion on the side of unbelief, but Christianity has a still greater name to oppose to it ; *philosophers* themselves being judges.

Newton, who studied the book of nature with a scrutiny which has never been permitted to any other mortal eye, was deeply learned in the book of God. And the ablest writer on the intellect of man, has left one of the ablest treatises *on the Reasonableness of Christianity*. The essay of Mr. Locke on the *Human Understanding* will stand up to latest ages, as a monument of wisdom ; while Hume's posthumous work, *the Essay on Suicide*, which had excited such large expectations, has been long since forgotten.\*

\* The Essay on Suicide was published soon after Mr. Hume's death. It might mortify his liberal mind (if matter and motion were capable of conscious-



Pascal has proved that as much rhetoric and logic too may be shown in defending revelation as in attacking it. His geometrical spirit was not likely to take up with

ness) to learn, that this his dying legacy, the last concentrated effort of his genius and his principles, sent from the grave, as it were, by a man so justly renowned in other branches of literature, produced no sensation on the public mind. And that the precious information that every man had a right to be his own executioner, was considered as a privilege so little desirable, that it probably had not the glory of converting one *cross road* into a cemetery. It is to the credit of this country that fewer copies of this work were sold than perhaps ever was the case with a writer of so much eminence. A more impotent act of wickedness has seldom been achieved, or one which has had the glory of making fewer persons wicked or miserable. That cold and cheerless oblivion which he held out as a refuge to beings who had solaced themselves with the soothing hope of immortality has, by a memorable retribution, overshadowed his own last labour: the *Essay on Suicide* being already as much forgotten as he promised the best men that they themselves would be. And this favourite work became at once a prey to that eternal night to which he had consigned the whole human race.

any proofs but such as came as near to demonstration as the nature of the subject would admit. *Erasmus* in his writings on the ignorance of the Monks, and the Provincial Letters on the fallacies of the Jesuits, while they exhibit as entire a freedom from bigotry, exhibit also as much pointed wit, and as much sound reasoning, as can be found in the whole mass of modern Philosophy.

But while the young adopt the opinion from one class of writers, that religious men are weak men, they acquire from another class a notion that they are ridiculous. And this opinion, by mixing itself with their common notions, and deriving itself from their very amusements, is the more mischievous, as it is imbibed without suspicion, and entertained without resistance.

One common medium through which they take this false view is, those favourite works of wit and humour, so captivating to youthful imaginations, where no small

part of the author's success perhaps, has been owing to his dexterously introducing a pious character with so many virtues, that it is impossible not to love him ; yet tinged with so many absurdities, that it is equally impossible not to laugh at him. The reader's memory will furnish him with too many instances of what is here meant. The slightest touches of a witty malice can make the best character ridiculous. It is effected by any little awkwardness, absence of mind, an obsolete phrase, a formal pronunciation, a peculiarity of gesture. Or if such a character be brought by unsuspecting honesty, and credulous goodness into some foolish scrape, it will stamp on him an impression of ridicule so indelible, that all his worth shall not be able to efface it: and the young, who do not always separate their ideas very carefully, shall ever after, by this early and false association, conceive of piety as having something essentially ridiculous in itself.

• But one of the most infallible arts by

which the inexperienced are engaged on the side of irreligion, is that popular air of candour, good-nature, and toleration, which it so invariably puts on. While sincere piety is often accused of moroseness and severity, because it cannot hear the doctrines on which it founds its eternal hopes derided without emotion; indifference and unbelief purchase the praise of candour at an easy price, because they neither suffer grief nor express indignation at hearing the most awful truths ridiculed, or the most solemn obligations set at nought. The two parties do not engage on equal terms. The infidel appears good humoured from his very levity; but the Christian cannot jest on subjects which involve his everlasting salvation.

The prophane wits whom young people hear talk, and the books which they hear quoted, falsely charge their own injurious opinions on Christianity, and then unjustly accuse her of being the monster they have made. They dress her up with the sword of

persecution in one hand, and the flames of intolerance in the other; and then ridicule the sober-minded for worshipping an idol which their misrepresentation has rendered as malignant as Moloch. In the mean time they affect to seize on benevolence with exclusive appropriation as their own cardinal virtue, and to accuse of a bigotted cruelty, that narrow spirit which points out the perils of licentiousness, and the terrors of a future account. And yet this benevolence, with all its tender mercies, is not afraid nor ashamed to endeavour at snatching away from humble piety the comfort of a present hope, and the bright prospect of a felicity that shall have no end. It does not, however, seem a very probable means of increasing the stock of human happiness, to plunder mankind of that principle, by the destruction of which friendship is robbed of its bond, society of its security, patience of its motive, morality of its foundation, integrity of its reward,

sorrow of its consolation, life of its balm, and death of its support.\*

It will not perhaps be one of the meanest advantages of a better state that, as the will shall be reformed, so the judgment shall be rectified; that "evil shall no more be called good," nor the "churl liberal;" nor the plunderer of our best possession, our principles, *benevolent*. Then it will be evident that greater injury could not be done to truth, nor greater violence to language, than by attempting to wrest from Christianity that benevolence which is in

\* Young persons too are liable to be misled by that extreme disingenuousness of the new philosophers, when writing on every thing and person connected with revealed religion. These authors often quote satirical poets as grave historical authorities; for instance, because Juvenal has said that the Jews were so narrow-minded that they refused to show a spring of water, or the right road to an inquiring traveller who was not of their religion, I make little doubt but many an ignorant free-thinker has actually gone away with the belief, that such good-natured acts of information were actually forbidden by the law of Moses.

fact her most appropriate and peculiar attribute. —“ A new commandment give I “ unto you, that ye love one another.” If benevolence be “ good will to men,” it was that which angelic messengers were not thought too high to announce, nor a much higher being than Angels too great to teach by his example, and to illustrate by his death. It was the criterion, the very watch word, as it were, by which he intended his religion and his followers should be distinguished. “ By this shall all men “ know that ye are my disciples, if ye “ have love one to another.” Besides, it is the very genius of Christianity to extirpate selfishness, that tenacious and last surviving corruption, on whose vacated ground benevolence naturally and necessarily plants itself.

But not to run through all the particulars which obstruct the growth of piety in young persons, I shall only name one more. They hear much declamation from the fashionable reasoners against the contracted

and interested spirit of Christianity—that it is of a sordid temper, works for pay, and looks for reward.

This jargon of French philosophy, which prates of pure disinterested goodness acting for its own sake, and equally despising punishment and disdaining recompense, indicates as little knowledge of human nature as of Christian revelation, when it addresses man as a being made up of pure intellect, without any mixture of passions, and who can be made happy without hope, and virtuous without fear. These Philosophers affect to be more independent than Moses, more disinterested than Christ himself; for “Moses had respect to the recompence of reward;” and Christ “endured the cross and despised the shame, for the joy that was set before him.”

A creature hurried away by the impulse of some impetuous inclination, is not likely to be restrained, if he be restrained at all, by a cold reflection on the beauty of virtue. If the dread of offending God, and incur-



ring his everlasting displeasure, cannot stop his career, how shall a weaker motive do it? When we see that the powerful sanctions which religion holds out are too often an ineffectual curb; to think of attaining the same end by feebler means, is as if one should expect to make a watch go the better by breaking the main-spring; nay, as absurd as if the philosopher who inculcates the doctrine should undertake, with one of his fingers, to lift an immense weight which had resisted the powers of the crane and the lever.

On calm and temperate spirits indeed, in the hour of retirement, in the repose of the passions, in the absence of temptation, virtue does seem to be her own adequate reward; and very lovely are the fruits she bears in preserving health, credit, and fortune. But on how few will this principle act! and even on them how often will its operation be suspended! And though virtue for her own sake might have captivated a few hearts, which should almost seem cast in

a natural mould of goodness, if such mould there were, yet no motive could, at all times, be so likely to restrain even these, especially under the pressure of temptation, as this simple assertion—*For all this, God will bring thee into judgment.*

It is the beauty of our religion, that it is not held out exclusively to a few select spirits; that it is not an object of speculation, or an exercise of ingenuity, but a scheme of Salvation, but a *rule of life*, suited to every condition, capacity, and temper. It is the glory of the Christian religion to *be*, what it was the glory of every antient philosophic system *not* to be, *the religion of the people*; and that which constitutes its characteristic value, is its suitableness to the genius, condition, and necessities of all mankind.

For with whatsoever obscurities it has pleased God to shadow some parts of his written word, yet he has graciously ordered, that whatever is necessary should be perspicuous also: and though, as to his adorable essence, “clouds and darkness are round

“ about him ;” yet these are not the medium through which he has left us to discover our duty. In this, as in all other points, revealed religion has a decided superiority over all the antient systems of philosophy, which were always in many respects impracticable and extravagant, because not framed from observations drawn from a perfect knowledge “ of what was in man.” Whereas the whole scheme of the Gospel is accommodated to real human nature ; laying open its mortal disease, presenting its only remedy ; exhibiting rules of conduct, often difficult, indeed, but never impossible ; and where the rule was so high that the practicability seemed desperate, holding out in its great author, a living pattern, to elucidate the doctrine and to illustrate the precept ; offering every where the clearest notions of what we have to hope, and what we have to fear ; the strongest injunctions of what we are to believe, and the most explicit directions of what we are to do. And crowning all with the most encouraging offers of Di-

vine assistance for strengthening our faith and quickening our obedience.

In short, whoever examines the wants of his own heart, and the appropriate assistance which the Gospel furnishes, will find them to be two tallies which exactly correspond—an internal evidence, stronger perhaps than any other, of the truth of revelation.

This is the religion with which the ingenuous hearts of youth should be warmed, and by which their minds, while pliant, should be directed. This will afford a “lamp to their paths,” stronger, steadier, brighter, than the feeble and uncertain glimmer of a cold and comfortless philosophy.



## CHAPTER IV.

*Other Symptoms of the Decline of Christianity  
—No Family Religion—Corrupt or negligent  
Example of Superiors—The Self-denying  
and Evangelical Virtues held in con-  
tempt—Neglect of encouraging and promot-  
ing Religion among Servants.*

It was by no means the design of the present undertaking to make a general invective on the corrupt state of manners, or even to animadvert on the conduct of the higher ranks, but inasmuch as the corruption of that conduct, and the depravation of those manners, appear to be a natural consequence of the visible decline of religion; and as operating in its turn, as a cause, on the inferior orders of society.

Of the other obvious causes which contribute to this decline of morals, little will be said. Nor is the present a romantic at-

tempt to restore the simplicity of primitive manners. This is too literally an age of gold, to expect that it should be so in the poetical and figurative sense. It would be unjust and absurd nor to form our opinions and expectations from the present general state of society. And it would argue great ignorance of the corruption which commerce, and conquest, and riches, and arts, necessarily introduce into a state, to look for the same sobermindedness, simplicity, and purity among the *dregs of Romulus*, as the severe and simple manners of elder Rome presented.

But though it would be an attempt of desperate hardihood, to controvert that maxim of the witty bard, that

To mend the world's a vast design ;

a popular aphorism, by the way, which has done no little mischief, inasmuch, as under the mask of hopelessness it suggests an indolent acquiescence ; yet to make the best of the times in which we live ; to fill up the

measure of our own actual, particular, and individual duties; and to take care that the age shall not be the worse for our having been cast into it, seems to be the bare dictate of common probity, and not a romantic flight of impracticable perfection.

Is it then so very chimerical to imagine, that the benevolent can be sober-minded? Is it romantic to desire, that the virtuous should be consistent? Is it absurd to fancy that what has once been practised should not now be impracticable?

It is impossible not to help regretting, that it should be the general temper of many of the leading persons of that age, which arrogates to itself the glorious character of the *age of benevolence*, to be kind, considerate, and compassionate, every where rather than at home; that the rich and the fashionable should be zealous in promoting religious as well as charitable institutions abroad, and yet discourage every thing which looks like religion in their own families: that they should be at a consider-

able expence in instructing the poor at a distance, and yet discredit piety among their own servants—those more immediate objects of every man's attention, whom Providence has enabled to keep any ; and for whose conduct he will be finally accountable, inasmuch as he may have helped, by his practice or his negligence, to corrupt it.

Is there any degree of pecuniary bounty without doors which can counteract the mischief of a wrong conduct at home, or atone for that infectious laxity of principle which spreads corruption wherever its influence extends? Is not he the best benefactor to society who sets the best example, and who does not only the most good, but the least evil? Will not that man, however liberal, very imperfectly promote virtue in the world at large, who neglects to disseminate its principles within the immediate sphere of his own personal influence, by a correct conduct and a blameless behaviour? Can a generous, but profligate, person atone by his purse for the disorders of his life?



Can he expect a blessing on his bounties, while he defeats their effect by a profane or even a careless conversation?

In moral as well as in political treatises, it is often asserted, that it is a great evil to do no good, but it has not been, perhaps, enough insisted on, that it is a great good to do no evil. This species of goodness is not ostentatious enough for popular declamation; and the value of this abstinence from vice is, perhaps, not well understood but by Christians, because it wants the ostensible brilliancy of actual performance.

But as the *principles* of Christianity are in no great repute, so their concomitant *qualities*, the evangelical virtues, are proportionably disesteemed. Let it, however, be remembered, that those secret habits of self-controul, those interior and unobtrusive virtues, which excite no astonishment, kindle no emulation, and extort no praise, are, at the same time, the most difficult, and the most sublime; and if Christianity be true, will be the most graciously accepted

by *him* who witnesses the secret combat and the silent victory : while the splendid deeds which have the world for their witness, and immortal fame for their reward, shall, perhaps, cost him who achieved them less than it costs a conscientious Christian to subdue one irregular inclination ; a conquest which the world will never know ; and, if it did, would probably despise.

Though great actions performed on human motives, are permitted by the supreme Disposer to be equally beneficial to society with such as are performed on purer principles ; yet it is an affecting consideration, that, at the final adjustment of accounts, the politician who *raised* a state, or the hero who *preserved* it, may miss of that favour of God which, if it was not his motive, will certainly not be his reward. And it is awful to reflect, as we visit the monuments justly raised by public gratitude, or the statues properly erected by well-earned admiration ; it is awful, I say, to reflect on what may now be the unalterable condition

of the illustrious object of these deserved but unavailing honours; it is awful to reflect that he who has saved a state may have lost his own soul!

A Christian life seems to consist of two things, almost equally difficult; the adoption of good habits, and the excision of such as are evil. No one sets out on a religious course with a stock of native innocence, or actual freedom from sin; for there is no such state in human life. The natural heart is not, as has been too often supposed, a blank paper, whereon the divine spirit has nothing to do but to stamp characters of goodness: no! many blots are to be erased, many defilements are to be cleansed, as well as fresh impressions to be made.

The vigilant Christian, therefore, who acts with an eye to the approbation of his Maker, rather than to that of mankind, to a future account, rather than to present glory, will find that, diligently to cultivate the "unweeded garden" of his own heart;

to mend the soil ; to clear the ground of its indigenous vices, by practising the painful business of extirpation, will be that part of his duty which will cost him most labour, and bring him least credit : while the fair flower of one shewy action, produced with little trouble, and of which the very pleasure is reward enough, shall gain him more praise than the eradication of the rankest weeds which over-run the natural heart.

But the Gospel judges not after the manner of men ; for it never fails to make the abstinent virtues a previous step to the right performance of the operative ones ; and the relinquishing what is wrong to be a necessary prelude to the performance of what is right. It makes “ ceasing to do evil ” the indispensable preliminary to “ learning to do well.” It continually suggests that something is to be laid aside, as well as to be practised. We must “ hate vain thoughts,” before we can “ love God’s law.” We must lay aside “ malice and hypocrisy,” to *enable* us

“ to receive the engrafted word.—Having “ a conscience void of offence ;” “ abstaining from fleshly lusts ;” bringing every thought into obedience ;”—these are actions, or rather negations, which though they never will obtain immortality from the chisel of the statuary, the declamation of the historian, or the panegyric of the poet, will, however, be “ had in everlasting remembrance,” when the works of the statuary, the historian, and the poet will be no more.

And, for our encouragement, is it observable that a more difficult Christian virtue generally involves an easier one. A habit of self-denial in permitted pleasures, easily induces a victory over such as are unlawful. And to sit loose to our own possessions, necessarily includes an exemption from coveting the possessions of others : and so on of the rest.

Will it be difficult then to trace back to that want of early restraint noticed in the preceding chapter, that licence of behaviour

which, having been indulged in youth, afterwards reigns uncontrolled in families; and which having infected education in its first springs, taints all the streams of domestic virtue? And will it be thought strange that that same want of religious principle which corrupted our children, should corrupt our servants?

We scarcely go into any company without hearing some invective against the increased profligacy of this order of men; and the remark is made with as great an air of astonishment, as if the cause of the complaint were not as visible as the truth of it. It would be endless to point out instances in which the increased dissipation of their *bettors* (as they are oddly called) has contributed to the growth of this evil. But it comes only within the immediate design of the present undertaking, to insist on the single circumstance of the almost total extermination of religion in fashionable families, as a cause adequate of itself to any consequence which depraved morals can produce.

Is there not a degree of injustice in persons who express strong indignation at those crimes which crowd our prisons, and furnish our incessant executions, and who yet discourage not an internal principle of vice : since those crimes are nothing more than that principle put into action ? And it is no less absurd than cruel, in such of the great as lead disorderly lives, to expect to prevent vice by the laws they make to restrain or punish it, while their own example is a perpetual source of temptation to commit it. If, by their own practice, they demonstrate that they think a vicious or a careless life is the only happy one, with what colour of justice can they inflict penalties on others, who, by acting on the same principle, naturally expect the same indulgence !

And indeed it is somewhat unreasonable to expect very high degrees of virtue and probity from a class of people whose whole life, after they are admitted into dissipated families, is one continued counteraction of

the principles in which they have probably been bred.

When a poor youth is transplanted from one of those excellent institutions which do honour to the present age, and give some hope of reforming the next, into the family of his noble benefactor in town, who has, perhaps, provided liberally for his instruction in the country; what must be his astonishment at finding the manner of life to which he is introduced diametrically opposite to that life to which he has been taught that salvation is alone annexed! He has been taught that it was his bounden duty to be devoutly thankful for his own scanty meal, perhaps of barley-bread; yet he sees his noble lord sit down every day

Not to a dinner, but a hecatomb;

to a repast for which every element is plundered, and every climate impoverished; for which nature is ransacked, and art is exhausted; without even the formal ceremony



of a slight acknowledgment. It will be fortunate for the master, if his servant does not happen to know that even the Pagans never sat down to a repast without making a libation to their deities; and that the Jews did not eat a little fruit, or drink a cup of water, without an expression of devout thankfulness.

Next to the law of God, he has been taught to reverence the law of the land, and to respect an act of parliament next to a text of Scripture: yet he sees his honourable protector publicly in his own house, engaged in the evening in playing at a game expressly prohibited by the laws, and against which perhaps he himself had been assisting in the day to pass an act.

While the contempt of religion was confined to wits and philosophers, the effect was not so sensibly felt. But we cannot congratulate the ordinary race of mortals on their emancipation from the old prejudices, or their indifference to usages, which long prescription has rendered sacred.

in their eyes; as it is not at all visible that the world is become happier in proportion as it is become more enlightened. We might rejoice more in the boasted diffusion of light and freedom, were it not apparent that bankruptcies are grown more frequent, robberies more common, divorces more numerous, and forgeries more extensive—that more rich men die by their own hand, and more poor men by the hand of the executioner—than when Christianity was practised by the vulgar, and countenanced, at least, by the great.

It is not to be regretted, therefore, while the affluent are encouraging so many admirable schemes for promoting religion among the children of the poor, that they do not like to *perpetuate* the principle, by encouraging it in their own children and their servants also? Is it not pity, since these last are so moderately furnished with the good things of this life, to rob them of that bright reversion, the bare hope of which is a counterpoise to all the hardships they

undergo here—especially since by diminishing this future hope, we shall not be likely to add to their present usefulness?

Still allowing, what has been already granted, that absolute infidelity is not the reigning evil, and that servants will perhaps be more likely to see religion neglected, than to hear it ridiculed,—would it not be a meritorious kindness in families of a better stamp, to furnish them with more opportunities of learning and practising their duty? Is it not impolitic indeed, as well as unkind, to refuse them any means of having impressed on their consciences the operative principles of Christianity? It is but little, barely not to *oppose* their going to church, not to *prevent* their doing their duty at home; their opportunities of doing both ought to be facilitated, by giving them, at certain seasons, as few employments as possible that may interfere with both. Even when religion is by pretty general consent banished from our families at home, that only furnishes a stronger reason why our

families should not be banished from religion in the churches.

But if these opportunities are not made easy and convenient to them, their superiors have no right to expect from them a zeal so far transcending their own, as to induce them to surmount difficulties for the sake of duty. Religion is never once represented in scripture as a light attainment; it is never once illustrated by an easy, a quiet, or an indolent allegory. On the contrary, it is exhibited under the active figure of a combat, a race; something expressive of exertion, activity, progress. And yet many are unjust enough to think that this warfare can be fought, though they themselves are perpetually weakening the vigour of the combatant; this race be run, though they are incessantly obstructing the progress of him who runs by some hard and interfering command. That our compassionate Judge, who "knoweth whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but dust," is particularly touched with the

feeling of *their* infirmities, can never be doubted; but what portion of forgiveness he will extend to those who lay on their virtue hard burdens "too heavy for them to bear," who shall say?

To keep an immortal being in a state of spiritual darkness, is a positive disobedience to *His* law, who when he bestowed the Bible, no less than when he created the material world, said, *Let there be light.* It were well, both for the advantage of master and servant, that the latter should have the doctrines of the Gospel frequently impressed on his heart; that his conscience should be made familiar with a system which offers such clear and intelligible propositions of moral duty. The striking interrogation, "how shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" will perhaps operate as forcibly on an uncultivated mind, as the most eloquent essay to prove that man is not an accountable being. That once credited promise, that "they who have done well shall go into ever-

“lasting life,” will be more grateful to the spirit of a plain man, than that more elegant and disinterested sentiment, that *virtue is its own reward*. That “he that walketh uprightly walketh surely,” is not on the whole a dangerous, or a misleading maxim. And “well done, good and faithful servant! I will make thee ruler over many things,” though a promise offensive to the liberal spirit of philosophic dignity, is a comfortable support to humble and oppressed, and suffering piety. That “we should do to others as we would they should do to us,” is a portable measure of human duty, always at hand, as always referring to something within himself, not amiss for a poor man to carry constantly about with him, who has neither time nor learning to search for a better. It is an universal and compendious law, so universal as to include the whole compass of social obligation; so compendious as to be inclosed in so short and plain an aphorism; that the dullest mind cannot misapprehend, nor the weakest

memory forget it. It is convenient for bringing out on all the ordinary occasions of life, and for practising in every possibility of human intercourse. "We need not say "who shall go up to heaven and bring "it unto us, for this word is very nigh "unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, "that thou mayest do it."\*

For it is a very valuable part of the gospel of Christ, that though it is an entire and perfect system in its design ; though it exhibits one great plan, from which complete trains of argument, and connected schemes of reasoning may be deduced ; yet in compassion to the multitude, for whom this benevolent institution was in a good measure designed, and who could not have comprehended a long chain of propositions, or have embraced remote deductions, the most important truths of doctrine, and the most essential documents of virtue, are detailed in single maxims, and comprised in short sentences ; inde-

\* Deut. xxx. 11 and 12.

pendent of themselves, yet making a necessary part of a consummate whole; from a few of which principles the whole train of human virtues has been deduced, and many a perfect body of ethics has been framed.

If it be thought wonderful, that from so few letters of the alphabet, so few figures of arithmetic, so few notes in music, such endless combinations should have been produced in their respective arts; how far more beautiful would it be to trace the whole circle of practical virtues thus growing out of a few elementary principles of gospel truth.

All Seneca's arguments against the fear of death, though powerful as human wisdom, and unassisted reason could suggest, never yet reconciled one reader to its approach, half so effectually as the humble believer is reconciled to it by that simple persuasion, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

While the modern philosopher is extending the boundaries of human know-



ledge, by undertaking to prove that matter is eternal ; or enlarging the stock of human happiness, by demonstrating the extinction of spirit,—it can do no harm to an unlettered man to believe, that “heaven and “earth shall pass away, but God’s word “shall not pass away.” While the former is indulging the profitable enquiry why the Deity made the world so late, or why he made it at all, it will not hurt the latter to believe, that “in the beginning God made “the world,” and that in the end “he “shall judge it in righteousness.”

While the liberal scholar is usefully studying the law of nature and of nations, let him rejoice that his more illiterate brother possesses the plain conviction that “love “is the fulfilling of the law”—that “love “working no ill to his neighbour.” And let him be persuaded that he himself, though he know all Tully’s offices by heart, may not have acquired a more feeling and operative sentiment than is conveyed to the *common* Christian in the rule to “bear each other’s

“ burthens.” While the wit is criticising the creed, he will be no loser by encouraging his dependents to keep the commandments; since a few such simple propositions as the above furnish a more practical and correct rule of life than can be gleaned from all the volumes of ancient philosophy, justly eminent as many of them are for wisdom and purity. For though they abound with passages of true sublimity, and sentiments of great moral beauty, yet the result is naturally defective, the conclusions necessarily contradictory. This was no fault of the author, but of the system. The vision was acute, but the light was dim. The sharpest sagacity could not distinguish spiritual objects, in the twilight of natural religion, with that accuracy with which they are now discerned by every common Christian, in the diffusion of gospel light.

And whether it be that what depraves the principle darkens the intellect also, certain it is that an uneducated serious Christian reads his bible with a clearness of intelli-

gence, with an intellectual perception, which no sceptic or mere worldling ever attains. The plain Christian has not prejudged the cause he is examining. He is not often led by his passions, still more rarely by his interest, to resist his convictions. While "the secret of the Lord is" (obviously) with them that fear him, the mind of them who fear him *not*, is generally prejudiced by a retaining fee from the world, from their passions or their pride, before they enter on the enquiry. The decision is made before the inquiry is begun.

With what consistency can the covetous man embrace a religion which so pointedly forbids him to lay up "treasures upon earth?" How will the man of spirit, as the world is pleased to call the duellist, relish a religion which allows not "the sun to go down upon his wrath?" How can the ambitious struggle for "a kingdom which is not of this world," and embrace a faith which commands him to lay down his

crown at the feet of another? How should the professed wit or the mere philosopher adopt a system which demands in a lofty tone of derision, "Where is the scribe? Where is the wife? Where is the disputer of this world?" How will the self-satisfied formalist endure a religion which, while it peremptorily demands from him every useful action, and every right exertion, will not permit him to rest his hope of salvation on their performance? He whose affections are voluntarily rivetted to the present world, will not much delight in a scheme whose avowed principle is to set him above it.—The obvious consequence of these "hard sayings" is illustrated by daily instances.—"Have any of the rulers believed on him?" is a question not confined to the first age of his appearance. Had the most enlightened philosophers of the most polished nations, collected all the scattered wit and learning of the world into one point in order to invent a religion for the salvation of mankind, the doctrine of the cross is perhaps

precisely the thing they would never have hit upon; precisely the thing which, being offered to them, they would reject. The intellectual pride of the philosopher relished it as little as the worldly pride of the Jew; for it flattered human wit no more than it gratified human grandeur. The self-sufficiency of great acquirements, and of great wealth, equally obstructs the reception of divine truth into the heart; and whether the natural man be called upon to part either from "great possessions," or "high imaginations," he equally goes away sorrowing.

## CHAPTER V.

*The negligent Conduct of Christians no real Objection against Christianity.—The reason why its Effects are not more manifest to Worldly Men, is, because Believers do not lead Christian Lives.—Professors differ but little in their Practice from Unbelievers.—Even real Christians are too diffident and timid, and afraid of acting up to their Principles.—The Absurdity of the Charge commonly brought against religious People, that they are too strict.*

It is an objection frequently brought against Christianity, that if it exhibited so perfect a scheme, if its influences were as strong, if its effects were as powerful, as its friends pretend, it must have produced more visible consequences in the reformation of mankind. This is not the place fully to answer this

objection, which, like all the other cavils against our religion, continues to be urged just as importunately as if it never *had* been answered.

That vice and immorality prevail in no small degree in countries professing Christianity, we need not go out of our own to be convinced. But that this is the case only because this benign principle is not suffered to operate in its full power, will be no less obvious to all who are sincere in their enquiries: For if we allow (and who that examines impartially can help allowing?) that it is the natural tendency of Christianity to make men better, then it must be the aversion from receiving it as a practical principle, and not the fault of the principle itself, which prevents them from becoming so.

Those who are acquainted with the effects which Christianity actually produced in the first ages of the church, when it *was* received in its genuine purity, and when it *did* operate without obstruction, from its

professors at least, will want no other proof of its inherent power and efficacy. At that period, its most decided and industrious enemy, the emperor Julian, could recommend the *manners* of the Galileans to the imitation of his Pagan high priest; though he himself, at the same time, was doing every thing which the most inveterate malice, sharpened by the acutest wit, and backed by the most absolute power, could devise, to discredit their doctrines.

Nor would the efficacy of Christianity be less visible now in influencing the conduct of its professors, if its doctrines were heartily and sincerely received. They would, were they of the true genuine cast of the Gospel, operate on the conduct so effectually, that we should see morals and manners growing out of principles, as we see other consequences grow out of their proper and natural causes. Let but this great spring have its unobstructed play, and there would be little occasion to declaim against this excess or that enormity. If the same



skill and care which are employed in curing symptoms, were vigorously levelled at the internal principle of the disease, the moral health would feel the benefit. If that attention which is bestowed in lopping the redundant and unsightly branches, were devoted to the cultivation of a sound and uncorrupt root, the effect of this labour would soon be discovered by the excellence of the fruits.

For though, even in the highest possible exertion of religious principle, and the most diligent practices of all its consequential train of virtues, man would still find evil propensities enough, in his fallen nature, to make it necessary that he should counteract them, by keeping alive his diligence after higher attainments, and to quicken his aspirations after a better state; yet the prevailing temper would be in general right, the will would be in a great measure rectified; and the heart, feeling and acknowledging its disease, would apply itself diligently to the only remedy. Thus though even the best

men have infirmities enough to deplore, though they commit sins enough to keep them deeply humble, and feel more sensibly than others the corruption of their nature, and the imperfections of that vessel in which their heavenly treasure is hid, they however have the internal consolation of knowing that they shall have to do with a merciful Father, who “despiseth not the  
“sighing of the contrite heart, nor the  
“desire of such as be sorrowful;” with a gracious judge who has been witness to all their struggles against sin, and to whom they can appeal with Peter for the sincerity of their desires—“Lord! Thou knowest  
“all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee.”

All the heavy charges which have been brought against religion, have been taken from the abuses of it. In every other instance, the injustice of this proceeding would be notorious: but there is a general want of candour in the judgment of men on this subject, which we do not find them

exercise on other occasions ; that of throwing the fault of the erring or ignorant professor on the profession itself.

It does not derogate from the honourable profession of arms, that there are cowards and braggarts in the army. If any man lose his estate by the chicanery of an attorney, or his health by the blunder of a physician, it is commonly said that the one was a disgrace to his business, and the other was ignorant of it ; but no one therefore concludes as a natural inference, that law and physic are contemptible professions.

Christianity alone is obliged to bear all the obloquy incurred by the misconduct of its followers ; to sustain all the reproach excited by ignorant, by fanatical, by superstitious, or hypocritical professors. But whoever accuses it of a tendency to produce the errors of these professors, must have picked up his opinion any where rather than in the New Testament ; which Book being the only authentic history of Christianity, is that which candour would naturally consult for information.

But as worldly and irreligious men do not draw their notions from that pure fountain, but from the polluted stream of human practice; as they form their judgment of divine truth from the conduct of those who pretend to be enlightened by it; some charitable allowance *must* be made for the contempt which they entertain for Christianity, when they see what poor effects it produces in the lives of the generality of professing Christians. What do they ordinarily observe there which can lead them to entertain very high ideas of the principles which give birth to such practices?

Do men of the world discover any marked, any decided difference between the conduct of nominal Christians and that of the rest of their neighbours, who pretend to no religion at all? Do they see, in the daily lives of such, any great abundance of those fruits by which they have heard believers are to be known? On the contrary, do they not discern in them the same anxious and unwearied pursuit after the

things of earth, as in those who do not profess to have any thought of heaven? Do not they see them labour as sedulously in the interests of a debasing and frivolous dissipation, as those who do not pretend to have any nobler object in view? Is there not the same eagerness to plunge into all sorts of follies themselves, and the same unrighteous speed in introducing their children to them, as if they had never entered into a solemn engagement to renounce them? Is there not the same self-indulgence, the same luxury, and the same passionate attachment to the things of this world in *them*, as is visible in those who do not look for another?

Do not thoughtless neglect, and habitual carelessness answer, as to society, all the ends of the most decided infidelity? Between the barely decent and the openly profane there is indeed this difference,—That the one, by making no profession, deceives neither the world nor his own heart; while the other, by entrenching himself in forms,

fancies that he does something, and thanks God that "he is not like this publican." The one only shuts his eyes upon the danger which the other despises.

But these unfruitful professors would do well to recollect that, by a conduct so little worthy of their high calling, they not only violate themselves the law to which they have vowed obedience, but occasion many to disbelieve or to despise it; that they are thus in a great measure accountable for the infidelity of others, and of course will have to answer for more than their own personal offences. For did they in any respect live up to the principles they profess; did they adorn the doctrines of Christianity by a life in any degree consonant to their faith; did they exhibit any thing of the "beauty of holiness" in their daily conversation; they would then give such a demonstrative proof, not only of the sincerity of their own obedience, but of the brightness of that divine light by which they profess to walk, that the most determined unbeliever would at

last begin to think there must be *something* in a religion of which the effects were so visible, and the fruits so amiable; and might in time be led to “glorify,” not *them*, not the imperfect doers of these works, but “their Father which is in heaven.” Whereas, as things are at present carried on, the obvious conclusion must be, either that Christians do not believe in the religion they profess, or that there is no truth in the religion itself, or that it is of no potency to influence practice.

For, will he not naturally say, that if its influences were so predominant, its consequences *must* be more evident? that if the prize held out were really so bright, those who truly believe so, would surely *do* something, and *sacrifice* something to obtain it?

This effect of the careless conduct of believers on the hearts of others, will probably be a heavy aggravation of their own guilt at the final reckoning:—and there is no negligent Christian can guess where the in-

fection of his example may stop ; or how remotely it may be pleaded as a palliation of the sins of others, who either may think themselves safe while they are only doing what Christians allow themselves to do ; or who may adduce a Christian's habitual violation of the divine law, as a presumptive evidence that there is no truth in Christianity.

This swells the amount of the actual mischief beyond calculation ; and there is something terrible in the idea of this sort of indefinite evil, that the careless Christian can never know the extent of the contagion which he spreads, nor the multiplied infection which *they* may communicate in *their* turn, whom *his* disorders first corrupted.

And there is this farther aggravation of his offence, that he will not only be answerable for all the positive evils of which his example is the cause ; but for the omission of all the probable good which might have been called forth in others, had *his*



actions been consistent with his profession. What a strong, what an almost irresistible conviction, would it carry to the hearts of unbelievers, if they beheld that characteristic difference in the manners of Christians, which their profession gives one a right to expect,—if they saw that disinterestedness, that humility, sober-mindedness, temperance, simplicity, and sincerity, which are the unavoidable fruits of a genuine faith, and which the Bible has taught them to expect in every Christian!

But, while a man talks like a saint, and yet lives like a sinner; while he professes to believe like an apostle, and yet leads the life of a sensualist; while he talks of an ardent faith, and yet exhibits a cold and low practice; while he boasts himself the disciple of a meek Master, and yet is as much a slave to his passions as they who acknowledge no such authority; while he appears the proud professor of an humble religion, or the intemperate champion of a self-denying religion, or the covetous advocate of a

disinterested religion, such a man brings Christianity into disrepute, confirms those in error who might have been awakened to conviction, strengthens doubt into disbelief, and hardens indifference into contempt.

Even among those of a better cast and a purer principle, the excessive restraints of timidity, caution, and that “fear of man, which bringeth a snare,” confine, and almost stifle the generous spirit of an ardent exertion in the cause of religion. Christianity may pathetically expostulate, that it is not always “an open enemy which dishonours her,” but her “familiar friend.” And, “what dost thou more than others?” is a question which even the good and worthy should often ask themselves, in order to quicken their zeal; to prevent the total stagnation of unexerted principles, on the one hand; or the danger, on the other, of their being driven down the gulph of ruin by the unresisted and confluent tides of temptation, fashion, and example.

In a very strict and mortified age, of

which a scrupulous severity was the predominant character, precautions against an excessive zeal might, and doubtless would, be a wholesome and prudent measure. But in these times of relaxed principle and frigid indifference, to see people so vigilantly on their guard against the imaginary mischiefs of enthusiasm, while they run headlong into the real opposite perils of a destructive licentiousness, reminds us of the one-eyed animal in the fable; who, living on the banks of the ocean, never fancied he could be destroyed any way but by drowning: but, while he kept that one eye constantly fixed on the sea, on which side he concluded all the peril lay, he was devoured by an enemy on the dry land, from which quarter he never suspected any danger.

Are not the mischiefs of an enthusiastic piety insisted on with as much earnestness, as if an extravagant devotion were really the prevailing propensity? Is not the necessity of moderation as vehemently urged as if an intemperate zeal were the epidemic dis-

temper of the great world? as if all our apparent danger and natural bias lay on the side of a too rigid austerity, which required the discreet and constant counteraction of an opposite principle? Would not a stranger be almost tempted to imagine, from the frequent invectives against extreme strictness, that abstraction from the world, and a monastic rage for retreat, were the ruling temper? that we were in some danger of seeing our places of diversion abandoned, and the enthusiastic scenes of the *Holy Fathers of the desert* acted over again by the frantic and uncontrollable devotion of our young persons of fashion?

It is not to be denied, that enthusiasm is an evil to which the more religious of the lower class are peculiarly exposed, and this from a variety of causes, upon which this is not the place to enlarge. But who will be hardy enough to assert, that the class we are now addressing commonly fall into the same error? In order to establish the fact, or to overthrow the assertion, let each fashion-

able reader confess whether, within the sphere of his own observation, the charge be realized. Let each bring this vague accusation specifically home to his own acquaintance. Let him honestly declare what proportion of noble enthusiasts, what number of honourable fanatics, his own personal knowledge of the great world supplies him with. Let him compare the list of his enthusiastic with that of his luxurious friends, of his fanatical with his irreligious acquaintance, of "the righteous over much" with such as "care for none of these things;" of the strict and precise with that of the loose and irregular, of those who beggar themselves by their pious alms with those who injure their fortune by extravagance; of those who "are lovers of God" with those who are "lovers of pleasure." Let him declare whether he sees more of his own associates swallowed up in gloomy meditation or immersed in sensuality; whether more are the slaves of superstitious observances, or of worldly ambition.

Surely those who address the rich and great in the way of exhortation and reproof, would do particularly well to define exactly what is indeed the prevailing character; lest, for want of such discrimination they should heighten the disease they might wish to cure, and increase the bias they would desire to counteract, by addressing to the voluptuary cautions which belong to the hermit, and thus aggravate his already inflamed appetites by invectives against an evil of which he is in little danger.

If, however, superstition, where it really does exist, injures religion, and we grant that it greatly injures it, yet we insist that scepticism injures it no less : for to deride, or to omit, any of the component parts of Christian faith, is surely not a less fatal evil than making uncommanded additions to it.

Again, if enthusiasm disfigures Christianity, and we grant that it greatly disfigures it, yet surely those who reject Christianity, or who live as if there were

no Christianity in the world, can never prove themselves to be right, because they can easily prove enthusiasm to be wrong.

It is seriously to be regretted in an age like the present, remarkable for indifference in religion and levity in manners, and which stands so much in need of lively patterns of firm and resolute piety, it is I say to be regretted, that many who really are Christians on the soberest conviction, should not appear more openly and decidedly on the side they have espoused; that they should assimilate so very much with the manners of those about them—which manners they yet scruple not to disapprove—and, instead of an avowed but prudent steadfastness, which might draw over the others, appear evidently fearful of being thought precise and over scrupulous; and actually seem to disavow their right principles, by concessions and accommodations not strictly consistent with them. They often seem cautiously afraid of *doing too much*, and *going too far*; and the dan-

gerous plea, the necessity of *living like other people*, of *being like the rest of the world*, and the propriety of *not being particular*, is brought as a reasonable apology for a too yielding and indiscriminate conformity.

But, at a time when almost all are sinking into the prevailing corruption, how beautiful a rare, a single integrity is, let the instance of Lot standing out against a whole polluted city, of Noah, resisting the torrent of a whole polluted world declare! And to those with whom a poem is an higher authority than the Bible, let me recommend the most animated picture of a righteous singularity that ever was delineated, in

—The Seraph Abdiel, faithful found

Among the faithless, faithful only he

Among innumerable false, unmov'd,

Unshaken, unseduc'd, untterrify'd,

His loyalty he kept, his love and zeal :

Nor NUMBERS, nor EXAMPLES with him wrought

To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,

Tho' SINGLE.

PAR. LOST, B. iv.



Few indeed of the more orderly and decent have any objection to that degree of religion which is compatible with their general acceptance with others, or the full enjoyment of their own pleasures. For a formal and ceremonious exercise of the outward duties of Christianity may not only be kept up without exciting censure, but will even procure a certain respect and confidence ; and is not quite irreconcilable with a voluptuous and dissipated life. So far many go ; and so far as “godliness is profitable to the life that is,” it passes not only without reproach, but secures approbation.

\* But as soon as men begin to consider religious exercises not as a decency, but an indispensable duty ; not as a commutation for a self-denying life, but as a means to promote a holy temper and a virtuous conduct ; as soon as they feel disposed to carry the effect of their devotion into their daily life ; as soon as their principles discover themselves, by leading them to withdraw from

those scenes, and abstain from those actions in which the gay place their supreme happiness; as soon as something is to be *done*, and something is to be *parted with*, then the world begins to take offence, and to stigmatize the *activity* of that piety which had been commended as long as it remained *inactive*, and had only evaporated in *words*.

When religion, like the vital principle, takes its seat in the heart, and sends out supplies of life and heat to every part; diffuses motion, spirit, soul, and vigour, through the whole circulation, and informs and animates the whole man; when it operates on the practice, influences the conversation, breaks out into a lively zeal for the honour of God, and the best interests of mankind,—then the sincerity of heart or the sanity of mind, of that person will become questionable; and it must be owing to a very fortunate combination of circumstances indeed, if he can at once preserve the character of parts and piety; if he can

retain the reputation of a man of sense after he has acquired that of a Christian.

It is surely a folly to talk of being too holy, too strict, or too good. Where there really happens to appear some foundation for the charge of enthusiasm, as there are indeed sometimes, in good people eccentricities which justify the censure, we may depend upon it, that it proceeds from some defect in the judgment, and not from any excess in the piety: for in goodness there is no excess: and it is as preposterous to say that any one is too good, or too pious, as that he is too wise, too strong, or too healthy; since the highest point in all these is only the perfection of that quality which we admired in a lower degree. There may be an *imprudent*, but there cannot be a *super-abundant* goodness. An ardent imagination may mislead a rightly-turned heart; and a weak intellect may incline the best intentioned to ascribe too much value to things of comparatively small importance. Such a one not having discernment enough to per-

ceive where the force and stress of duty lie, may inadvertently discredit religion by a too scrupulous exactness in points of small intrinsic value. And even well-meaning men as well as hypocrites may think they have done a meritorious service when their "mint" and "anise" are rigorously tithed.

But, in observing the "weightier matters" of the law, in the adoption of the grand peculiarities of the Gospel, in the practice of universal holiness, in the love of God, there can be no possibility of exceeding, while there is no limitation in the command. We are in no danger of loving our neighbour *better* than ourselves; and let us remember that we do not go beyond, but fall short of the command, while we love him *less*. If we were commanded to love God with *some* of our heart, with *part* of our soul, and a *portion* of our strength, there would then be some colour for those perpetual cavils about the *proportion* of love and the *degree* of obedience which are due to him. But, as the command is so definite, so absolute, so com-

prehensive, so entire, nothing can be more absurd than that unmeaning, but not unfrequent charge, brought against religious persons, that *they are too strict*. It is in effect saying, that they love God too much, and serve him too well; that their hearts are too intently fixed on heaven, and their thoughts too sedulously bent on the way to get thither.

The foundation of this silly censure is commonly laid in the first principles of education, where an early separation is systematically made between piety and pleasure. One of the first baits held out for the encouragement of children is, that when they have done their *duty*, they will be entitled to some *pleasure*; thus forcibly disjoining what should be considered as inseparable. And there is not a more common justification of that idle and dissipated manner in which the second half of the Sunday is commonly spent, even by those who make a conscience of spending the former part properly, than that, "now they

“ have done their duty, they may take their  
“ pleasure.”

But while Christian observances are considered as tasks, which are to be got over to entitle us to something more pleasant; as a burthen which we must endure in order to propitiate an inexorable Judge, who makes a hard bargain with his creatures, and allows them just so much amusement in pay for so much drudgery,—we must not wonder that such low views are entertained of Christianity, and that a religious life is reprobated as strict and rigid.

But to him who acts from the nobler motive of love, and the animating power of the Christian hope, the exercise is the reward, the permission is the privilege, the work is the wages. *He* does not carve out some miserable pleasure, and stipulate for some meagre diversion, to pay himself for the hard performance of his duty, who in that very performance experiences the highest pleasure; and feels the truest gratification of which his nature is capable, in devoting

the noblest part of that nature to *His* service, to whom he owes all, because from Him he has received all.

This reprobated strictness, therefore, so far from being the source of discomfort and misery, as is pretended, is in reality the true cause of actual enjoyment, by laying the axe to the root of all those turbulent and uneasy passions, the unreserved and yet imperfect gratification of which does so much more tend to disturb our happiness, than that self-government which Christianity enjoins.

But all precepts seem rigorous, all observances are really hard, where there is not in the heart an entire conviction of God's right to our obedience, and an internal principle of faith and love to make that obedience pleasant. A religious life is indeed a hard bondage to one immersed in the practices of the world, and under the dominion of its appetites and passions. To a real Christian, it is "perfect freedom." He does not now abstain from such and such things,

merely because they are forbidden, as he did in the first stages of his progress, but because his soul has no longer any pleasure in them. And it would be the severest of all punishments to oblige him to return to those practices, from which he once abstained with difficulty, and through the less noble principle of fear.

There is not therefore perhaps a greater mistake than that common notion entertained by the more orderly part of the fashionable world, that a little religion will make people happy, but that an high degree of it is incompatible with all enjoyment. For surely *that* religion can add little to a man's happiness which restrains him from the commission of a wrong action but which does not pretend to extinguish the bad principle from which the act proceeded. A religion which ties the hands, without changing the heart ; which, like the hell of Tantalus, subdues not the desire yet forbids the gratification, is indeed a most uncomfortable religion : and such a



religion, though it may gain a man something on the side of reputation, will give him but little inward comfort. For what true peace can that heart enjoy which is left a prey to that temper which produced the evil, even though terror or shame may have prevented the outward act.

That people devoted to the pursuits of a vain and voluptuous life, should conceive of religion as a difficult and even unattainable state, it is easy to believe. That they should conceive of it as an unhappy state, is the consummation of their error and their ignorance: for that a *rational* being should have his understanding enlightened; that an *immortal* being should have his views extended and enlarged: that a *helpless* being should have the consciousness of assistance, a *sinful* being the prospect of pardon, or a *fallen* one the assurance of restoration, does not seem a probable ground of unhappiness: and on any other subject but religion such reasoning would not be admissible.

## CHAPTER. VI.

*A Stranger, from observing the fashionable Mode of Life, would not take this to be a Christian Country.—Lives of Professing Christians examined, by a Comparison with the Gospel.—Christianity not made the Rule of Life, even by those who profess to receive it as an Object of Faith.—Temporizing Writers contribute to lower the Credit of Christianity.—Loose Harangues on Morals not calculated to reform the Heart.*

THE Christian religion is not intended, as some of its fashionable professors seem to fancy, to operate as a charm, a talisman, or incantation, and to produce its effect by our pronouncing certain mystical words, attending at certain consecrated places, and performing certain hallowed ceremonies; but it is an active, vital, influential prin-

ciple, operating on the heart, restraining the desires, affecting the general conduct, and as much regulating our commerce with the world, our business, pleasures, and enjoyments, our conversations, designs, and actions, as our behaviour in public worship, or even in private devotion.

That the effects of such a principle are strikingly visible in the lives and manners of the generality of those who give the law to fashion, will not perhaps be insisted on. And indeed the whole present system of fashionable life is utterly destructive of seriousness. To instance only in the growing habit of frequenting great assemblies, which is generally thought insignificant, and is in effect so vapid, that one almost wonders how it can be dangerous ;—it would excite laughter, because we are so broken into the habit, where I to insist on the immorality of passing one's whole life in a crowd.—But those promiscuous myriads which compose the society, falsely so called, of the gay world ; who are brought together without

esteem, remain without pleasure, and part without regret ; who live in a round of diversions, the possession of which is so joyless, though the absence is so insupportable ; these, by the mere force of incessant and indiscriminate association, weaken, and in time wear out, the best feelings and affections of the human heart. And the mere spirit of dissipation, thus contracted from invariable habit, even detached from all its concomitant evils is in itself as hostile to a religious spirit as more positive and actual offences. Far be it from me to say that it is as criminal ; I only insist that it is as opposite to that heavenly-mindedness which is the essence of the Christian temper.

Let us suppose an ignorant and unprejudiced spectator, who should have been taught the theory of all the religions on the globe, brought hither from the other hemisphere. Set him down in the politest part of our capital, and let him determine, if he can, except from what he shall seem interwoven in the texture of our

laws, and kept up in the service of our churches, to what particular religion we belong. Let him not mix entirely with the most flagitious, but only with the most fashionable ; at least, let him keep what they themselves call *the best company*. Let him scrutinize into the manners, customs, conversations, habits, and diversions, most in vogue, and then infer from all he has seen and heard, what is the established religion of the land.

That it could not be the Jewish he would soon discover ; for of rites, ceremonies, and external observances, he would trace but slender remains. He would be equally convinced that it could not be the religion of Old Greece and Rome ; for that enjoined reverence to the gods, and inculcated obedience to the laws. His most probable conclusion would be in favour of the Mahometan faith, did not the excessive indulgence of some of the most distinguished, in an article of intemperance prohibited even by

the sensual Prophet of Arabia, defeat that conjecture.

How will the petrified inquirer be astonished, if he were told that all these gay, thoughtless, luxurious, dissipated persons, professed a religion meek, spiritual, self-denying; of which humility, poverty of spirit, a renewed mind, and nonconformity to the world, were specific distinctions !

When he saw the sons of men of fortune, scarcely old enough to be sent to school, admitted to be spectators of the turbulent and unnatural diversions of racing and gaming; and the almost infant-daughters, even of wise and virtuous mothers (an innovation which fashion herself forbade till now) carried with most unthrifty anticipation to the frequent and late protracted ball,—would he believe that we were of a religion which has required from these very parents, a solemn vow that these children should be bred up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?” That they

should constantly “believe God’s holy word, and keep his commandments?”

When he observed the turmoils of ambition, the competitions of vanity, the ardent thirst for the possession of wealth, and the wild misapplication of it when possessed; how could he persuade himself that all these anxious pursuers of present enjoyment were the disciples of a Master who exhibited the very character and essence of his religion, as it were in a motto—“MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD?”

When he beheld those nocturnal clubs, so subversive of private virtue and domestic happiness, would he conceive that we were of a religion which in express terms “exhorts young men to be sober-minded?”

When he saw those magnificent and brightly-illuminated structures which decorate and disgrace the very precincts of the royal residence (to free itself from all these pollutions;) when he beheld the nightly offerings made to the demon of

play on whose cruel altar the fortune and happiness of wives and children are offered up without remorse; would he not conclude that we were of some of those barbarous religions which enjoin unnatural sacrifices, and whose horrid deities are appeased with nothing less than human victims?

Now ought we not to pardon our imaginary spectator, if he should not at once conclude that all the various descriptions of persons above noticed professed the Christian religion; supposing him to have no other way of determining but by the conformity of their manners to that rule by which he had undertaken to judge them? We indeed ourselves must judge with a certain latitude, and candidly take the present state of society into the account; which, in some few instances perhaps, must be allowed to dispense with that literal strictness, which more peculiarly belonged to the first ages of the Gospel.

But as this is really a Christian country,



professing to enjoy the purest faith in the purest form, it cannot be unreasonable to go a little farther, and inquire whether Christianity, however firmly established and generally professed in it, is really practised by that order of fashionable persons, who, while they are absorbed in the delights of the world, and their whole souls devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, yet still arrogate to themselves the honourable name of Christians, and occasionally testify their claim to this high character, by a general profession of their belief in, and a decent occasional compliance with the forms of religion, and the ordinances of our church?

This inquiry must be made, not by a comparison with the state of Christianity in other countries; (a mode always fallacious whether adopted by nations or individuals is that of comparing themselves with those who are still worse;) nor must it be made from any notions drawn from custom, decency, or any other human

standard ; but from a scripture view of what real religion is ;—from any one of those striking and comprehensive representations of it which may be found condensed in so many single passages of the sacred writings.

Whoever then looks into the Book of God, and observes its prevailing spirit, and then looks into that part of the world under consideration, will not surely be thought very censorious, if he pronounce that the conformity between them does not seem to be *very* striking ; and that the manners of the one do not very evidently appear to be dictated by the spirit of the other. Will he discover that the Christian religion is so much as pretended to be made the *rule of life* even by that decent order who profess not to have discarded it as an object of faith ? Do even the more regular, who neglect not public observances, consider Christianity as *the measure of their actions* ? Do even what the world calls religious persons employ their time, their

abilities, and their fortune, as talents for which they however confess they believe themselves accountable; or do they in any respect live, I will not say up to their profession (for what human being does so?) but in any consistency with it, or even with an eye to its predominant tendencies? Do persons in general of this description seem to consider the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel as any thing more than a form of words, necessary indeed to be repeated, and proper to be believed? But do they consider them as necessary to be adopted into a governing principle of action?

Is it acting a consistent part to declare in the solemn assemblies that they are "miserable offenders," and that "there is no health in them," and yet never in their daily lives to discover any symptom of that humility and self-abasement, which should naturally be implied in such a declaration?

Is it reasonable or compatible, I will not say with piety, but with good sense, earnestly to lament having "followed the devices and

“desires of their own hearts,” and then deliberately to plunge into such a torrent of dissipations as clearly indicates that they do not struggle to oppose *one* of these devices, to resist *one* of these desires? I dare not say this is hypocrisy, I do not believe it is, but surely it is inconsistency.

“Be ye not conformed to this world,” is a leading principle in the book they acknowledge as their guide. But after unresistingly assenting to this as a doctrinal truth, at church,—how absurd would they think any one who should expect them to adopt it into their practice! Perhaps the whole law of God does not exhibit a single precept more expressly, more steadily, and more uniformly rejected by the class in question. If it mean any thing, it can hardly be consistent with that mode of life emphatically distinguished by the appellation of *fashionable*.

Now, would it be much more absurd (for any other reason but because it is not the custom) if our legislators were to meet

one day in every week, gravely to read over all the obsolete statutes and rescinded acts of parliament, than it is for the order of persons of the above description to assemble every Sunday, to profess their belief in and submission to a system of principles which they do not so much as *intend* shall be binding on their practice ?

But to continue our inquiry.— There is not a more common or more intelligible definition of human duty, than that of “ Fear God, and keep his commandments.” Now, as to the first of these inseparable precepts, can we, with the utmost stretch of charity, be very forward to conclude that God is really “ very greatly feared,” in secret, by those who give too manifest indications that they live “ without him in “ the world ?” And as to the latter precept, which naturally grows out of the other—without noticing any of the flagrant breaches of the moral law, let us only confine ourselves to the allowed, general, and notorious violation of the third and fourth

commandments, by the higher as well as by the lower orders ; breaches so flagrant, that they force themselves on the observation of the most inattentive, too palpably to be either unnoticed or palliated.

Shall we have reason to change our opinion if we take that divine representation of the sum and substance of religion, and apply it as a touchstone in the present trial,—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God  
“with *all* thy heart, and with *all* thy mind,  
“and with *all* thy soul, and with *all* thy  
“strength, and thy neighbour as thyself?”  
Now, judging by inference, do we see many public proofs of that heavenly-mindedness which would be the inevitable effect of such a fervent and animated dedication of all the powers, faculties, and affections of the soul to him who gave it? And, as to the great rule of social duty expressed in the second clause, do we observe as much of that considerate kindness, that pure disinterestedness, that conscientious attention to the comfort of others, especially of depend-

ents and inferiors, as might be expected from those who enjoy the privilege of so unerring a standard of conduct? a standard which, if impartially consulted, must make our kindness to others bear an exact proportion to our self-love: a rule in which Christian principle, operating on human sensibility, could not fail to decide aright in every supposable case. For no man can doubt how he ought to act towards another, while the inward-corresponding suggestions of conscience and feeling concur in letting him know how he would wish, in a change of circumstances, that others should act towards him.

Or suppose we take a more detailed survey, by a third rule, which indeed is not so much the principle as the effect of piety—  
“ True religion, and undefiled, before God  
“ and the Father, is this: to visit the  
“ fatherless and widows in their affliction;  
“ and to keep himself *unspotted from the*  
“ *world.*” Now, if Christianity insists that obedience to the latter injunction be the

true evidence of the sincerity of those who fulfil the former, is the beneficence of the fashionable world *very* strikingly illustrated by this spotless purity, this exemption from the pollutions of the world, which is here declared to be its invariable concomitant?

But if we were to venture to take our estimate with a view more immediately evangelical; if we presumed to look for that genuine Christianity which consists in “repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;” to insist that, whatever *natural* religion and *fashionable* religion may teach, it is the peculiarity of the *Christian* religion to humble the sinner and exalt the Saviour; to insist that not only the grossly flagitious, but that *all* have sinned; that *all* are by nature in a state of condemnation? that *all* stand in need of mercy, of which there is no hope but on the Gospel terms; that eternal life is promised to those *only* who accept it on the offered conditions of “faith, repentance, and renewed obedience;”—if we were to insist



on such evidences of our Christianity as these ; if we were to express these doctrines in plain scriptural terms, without lowering, qualifying, disguising, or doing them away ; if we were to insist on this belief, and its implied and corresponding practices ! we are aware that, with whatever condescending patience this little tract might have been so far perused, many a fashionable reader would here throw it aside, as having now detected the palpable enthusiast, the abettor of “ strange doctrines,” long ago consigned over by the liberal and the polite to bigots and fanatics. And yet, if the Bible be true, this is a simple and faithful description of Christianity.

Surely, men forget that we are urging them upon their own principles ; that while we are pressing them with motives drawn from Christianity, they seem to have as little concern in those motives as if they themselves were of another religion. It is not a name that will stand us in stead. It is not merely glorying in the title of

Christians, while we are living in the neglect of its precepts; it is not valuing ourselves on the profession of religion as creditable; while we reject the power of it as fanatical, that will save us. In any other circumstance of life it would be accounted absurd to have a set of propositions, principles, statutes, or fundamental articles, and not to make them the ground of our acting as well as of our reasoning. In these supposed instances the blame would lie in the contradiction; in religion it lies in the agreement. Strange! that to act in consequence of received and acknowledged principles, should be accounted weakness! Strange, that what alone is truly consistent, should be branded as absurd! Strange that men must really forbear to act rationally, only that they may not be reckoned mad! Strange, that they should be commended for having prayed in the excellent words of the Bible and of our church, for “a clean heart, and a right spirit;” and yet, if they gave any sign of such a transfor-

mation of heart, they should be accounted, if not fantastical, at least, singular, weak, or melancholy men.

After having, however, just ventured to hint at what are indeed the humbling doctrines of the gospel, the doctrines to which alone eternal life is promised, we shall in deep humility forbear to enlarge on this part of the subject, which has been exhausted by the labours of wise and pious men in all ages. Unhappily, however, the most awakening of these writers are not the favourite guests in the closets of the more fashionable Christians ; who, when they happen to be more seriously disposed than ordinary, are fond of finding out some middle kind of reading, which recommends some half-way state, something between Paganism and Christianity, suspending the mind, like the position of Mahomet's tomb, between earth and heaven :—a kind of reading which, while it quiets the conscience by being on the side of morals, neither awakens fear,

nor alarms security. By dealing in generals, it comes home to the hearts of none : it flatters the passions of the reader, by ascribing high merit to the performance of certain right actions, and the forbearance from certain wrong ones ; among which, that reader must be very unlucky indeed who does not find some performances and some forbearances of his own. It at once enables him to keep heaven in his eye, and the world in his heart. It agreeably represents the readers to themselves as amiable persons, guilty indeed of a few faults, but never as condemned sinners under sentence of death. It commonly abounds with high encomiums on the dignity of human nature ; the good effects of virtue and health, fortune, and reputation ; the dangers of a blind zeal, the mischiefs of enthusiasm, and the folly of singularity, with various other kindred sentiments ; which, if they do not fall in of themselves with the corruptions of our nature, may, by a little warping, be easily accommodated to them.

These are the too successful practices of certain lukewarm and temporising writers, who have become popular by blunting the edge of that heavenly-tempered weapon, whose salutary keenness, but for their “deceitful handling,” would oftener “pierce to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.”

But those severer preachers of righteousness, who disgust by applying too closely to the conscience; who probe the inmost heart, and lay open all its latent peccancies; who treat of principles as the only certain source of manners; who lay the axe to the root, oftener than the pruning knife to the branch; who insist much and often on the great leading truths, that man is a fallen creature; who must be restored, if he be restored at all, by means very little flattering to human pride,—such heart-searching writers as these will seldom find access to the houses and hearts of the more modish Christians, unless they happen to owe their admission to some subordinate quality of style; unless they can captivate, with the

seducing graces of language, those well-bred readers, who are childishly amusing themselves with the garnish, when they are perishing for want of food ; who are searching for polished periods when they should be in quest of alarming truths ; who are looking for elegance of composition when they should be anxious for eternal life.

Whatever comparative praise may be due to the former class of writers, when viewed with others of a less decent order, yet I am not sure whether so many books of frigid morality, exhibiting such inferior motives of action, such moderate representations of duty, and such a low standard of principle, have not done religion much more harm than good ; whether they do not lead many a reader to inquire what is the lowest degree in the scale of virtue with which he may content himself, so as barely to escape eternal punishment ; how much indulgence he may allow himself, without absolutely forfeiting his chance of safety : what is the uttermost verge to which he

may venture of this world's enjoyment, and yet just keep within a possibility of hope for the next: adjusting the scales of indulgence and security with such a scrupulous equilibrium, as not to lose much pleasure, yet not incur much penalty.

This is hardly an exaggerated representation: and to these low views of duty is partly owing so much of that bare-weight virtue with which even Christians are so apt to content themselves: fighting for every inch of ground which may possibly be taken within the pales of permission, and stretching those pales to the utmost edge of that limitation about which the world and the Bible contend.

But while the nominal Christian is persuading himself that there can be no harm in going *a little farther*, the real Christian is always afraid of going too far. While the one is debating for a little more disputed ground, the other is so fearful of straying into the regions of unallowed indulgence, that he keeps at a prudent distance from

the extremity of his permitted limits ; and is as anxious in restricting as the other is desirous of extending them. One thing is clear, and it may be no bad indication by which to discover the state of a man's heart to himself ; while he is contending for this allowance, and stipulating for the other indulgence, it will shew him that, whatever change there may be in his life, there is none in his heart ; the temper remains as it did ; and it is by the inward frame rather than the outward act that he can best judge of his *own* state, whatever may be the rule by which he undertakes to judge of that of another.

It is less wonderful that there are not more Christians, than that Christians, as they are called, are not better men ; for if Christianity be not true, the motives to virtue are not high enough to quicken ordinary men to very extraordinary exertions. We see them do and suffer every day for popularity, for custom, for fashion, for the point of honour, not only more than good



men do and suffer for religion, but a great deal more than religion requires them to do. For her *reasonable service* demands no sacrifices but what are sanctioned by good sense, sound policy, right reason, and uncorrupt judgment.

Many of these fashionable professors even go so far as to bring their right faith as an apology for their wrong practice. They have a commodious way of intrenching themselves within the shelter of some general position of unquestionable truth : Even the great Christian hope becomes a snare to them. They apologize for a life of offence by taking refuge in the supreme goodness they are abusing. That "God is "all merciful," is the common reply to those who hint to them their danger. This is a false and fatal application of a divine and comfortable truth. Nothing can be more certain than the proposition, nor more delusive than the inference : for their deduction implies, not that he is merciful to sin repented of, but to sin continued in. But it is a most fallacious

hope to expect that God will violate his own covenant, or that he is indeed, "all mercy," to the utter exclusion of his other attributes of perfect holiness, purity, and justice.

It is a dangerous folly to rest on these vague and general notions of indefinite mercy; and nothing can be more delusive than this indefinite trust in being forgiven in our *own* way, after God has clearly revealed to us that he will only forgive us in *his* way. Besides, is there not something singularly base in sinning against God *because* he is merciful?

But the truth is, no one does truly trust in God, who does not endeavour to obey him. For to break his laws, and yet to depend on his favour; to live in opposition to his will, and yet in expectation of his mercy; to violate his commands, and yet look for his acceptance, would not, in any other instance, be thought a reasonable ground of conduct; and yet it is by no means as uncommon as it is inconsistent.

## CHAPTER. VII.

*View of those who acknowledge Christianity as a perfect System of Morals, but deny its Divine Authority. — Morality not the Whole of Religion.*

As in the preceding chapter notice was taken of that description of persons who profess to receive Christianity with great reverence as a matter of faith, who yet do not pretend to adopt it as a rule of conduct; I shall conclude these slight remarks with some short animadversions on another set of men, and that not a small one, among the decent and the fashionable, who profess to think it exhibits an admirable system of morals, while they deny its divine authority; though that authority alone can make the necessity of obeying its precepts binding on the consciences of men.

This is a very discreet scheme : for such persons at once save themselves from the discredit of having their understanding imposed upon by a supposed blind submission to evidences and authorities ; and yet, prudently enough, secure to themselves, in no small degree, the reputation of good men. By steering this middle kind of course, they contrive to be reckoned liberal by the *philosophers*, and decent by the believers.

But we are not to expect to see the pure morality of the Gospel very carefully transfused into the lives of such objectors. And indeed it would be unjust to imagine that the precepts *should* be most scrupulously observed by those who reject the authority. The influence of divine truth must necessarily best prepare the heart for an unreserved obedience to its laws. If we do not depend on the offers of the Gospel, we shall want the best motive to the actions and and performances which it enjoins. A lively belief *must* therefore precede a hearty obedi-

ence. Let those who think otherwise hear what the Saviour of the World has said :  
“ For this end was I born, and for this  
“ cause came I into the world, that I might  
“ bear witness unto the truth.” Those  
who reject the Gospel, therefore, reject the  
*power* of performing good actions. That  
command, for instance, to set “ our affec-  
“ tions on things above,” will operate but  
faintly, till that spirit from which the com-  
mand proceeds touches the heart, and con-  
vinces it that no human good is worthy of  
the entire affection of an immortal creature.  
An unreserved faith in the promiser *must*  
precede our acceptable performance of any  
duty to which the promise is annexed.

But as to a set of duties enforced by no  
other motive than a bare acquiescence in  
their beauty, and a cold conviction of their  
propriety, but impelled by no obedience to  
his authority who imposes them ; though  
we know not how well they might be per-  
formed by pure and impeccable beings, yet  
we know how they commonly *are* per-

formed by frail and disorderly creatures, fallen from their innocence, and corrupt in their very natures.

Nothing but a conviction of the truth of Christianity can reconcile thinking beings to the extraordinary appearances of things in the Creator's moral government of the world. The works of God are an enigma, of which his word alone is the solution. The dark veil which is thrown over the divine dispensations in this lower world, must naturally shock those who consider only the single scene which is acting on the present stage ; but is reconcileable to him who, having learnt from revelation the nature of the laws by which the great Author acts, trusts confidently that the catastrophe will set all to rights. The confusion which sin and the passions have introduced ; the triumph of wickedness ; the seemingly arbitrary disproportion of human conditions, accountable on no scheme but that which the Gospel has opened to us—have all a natural tendency to withdraw from the

love of God the hearts of those who erect themselves into critics on the divine conduct, and yet will not study the plan, and get acquainted with the rules, so far as it has pleased the Supreme Disposer to reveal them.

Till therefore the word of God is used as "a lamp to their paths," men can neither truly discern the crookedness of their own ways, nor the perfection of that light by which they are directed to walk. And this light can only be seen by its own proper brightness: it has no other medium. Until therefore "the secret of the Lord" is with men they will not truly "fear him;" until he has "enlarged their hearts" with the knowledge and belief of his word, they will not very vigorously run "the way of his commandments." Until they have acquired that "faith, without which it is impossible to please God," they will not attain that "holiness, without which no man can see him."

And indeed if God has thought fit to

make the Gospel an instrument of salvation, we must own the necessity of receiving it as a divine institution, before it is likely to operate very effectually on the human conduct. The great Creator, if we may judge by analogy from natural things, is so just and wise an œconomist, that he always adapts, with the most accurate precision, the instrument to the work; and never lavishes more means than are necessary to accomplish the proposed end. If therefore Christianity had been intended for nothing more than a mere system of ethics, such a system surely might have been produced at an infinitely less expence. The long chain of prophecy, the succession of miracles, the labours of apostles, the blood of the saints, to say nothing of the great and costly sacrifice which the Gospel records, might surely have been spared. Lessons of mere human virtue might have been delivered by some suitable instrument of human wisdom, strengthened by the visible authority of human power. A bare system of morals might have been



communicated to mankind, with a more reasonable prospect of advantage, by means not so repugnant to human pride. A mere scheme of conduct might have been delivered with far greater probability of the success of its reception by Antoninus the emperor, or Plato the philosopher, than by Paul the tent-maker, or Peter the fisherman,

Christianity, then, must be embraced entirely, if it be received at all. It must be taken, without mutilation, as a perfect scheme, in the way in which God has been pleased to reveal it. It must be accepted, not as exhibiting beautiful parts, but as presenting one consummate whole, of which the perfection arises from coherence and dependence, from relation and consistency. Its power will be weakened, and its energy destroyed, if every caviller pulls out a pin, or obstructs a spring with the presumptuous view of new modelling the divine work, and making it go to his own mind. There must be no breaking this system into portions of which we are at liberty to choose one

and reject another. There is no separating the evidences from the doctrines, the doctrines from the precepts, belief from obedience, morality from piety, the love of our neighbour from the love of God. If we allow Christianity to be any thing, we must allow it to be every thing: if we allow the Divine Author to be indeed unto us “wisdom and righteousness,” he must be also “sanctification and redemption.”

Christianity then is assuredly something more than a mere set of rules; and faith, though it never pretended to be the substitute for an useful life, is indispensably necessary to its acceptance with God. The Gospel never offers to make religion supercede morality, but every where clearly proves that morality is not the whole of religion. Piety is not only necessary as a *means*, but is itself a most important *end*. It is not only the best principle of moral conduct, but is an indispensable and absolute duty in itself. It is not only the highest motive to the practice of virtue, but is a

prior obligation, and absolutely necessary, even when detached from its immediate influence on outward actions. Religion will survive all the virtues of which it is the source ; for we shall be living in the noblest exercises of piety when we shall have no objects on which to exercise many human virtues. When there will be no distress to be relieved, no injuries to be forgiven, no evil habits to be subdued, there will be a Creator to be blessed and adored, a Redeemer to be loved and praised.

To conclude, a real Christian is not such merely by habit, profession, or education ; he is not a Christian in order to acquit his sponsors of the engagements they entered into in his name ; but he is one who has embraced Christianity from a conviction of its truth, and an experience of its excellence. He is not only confident in matters of faith by evidences suggested to his understanding, or reasons which correspond to his enquiries ; but all these evidences of

truth, all these principles of goodness, are worked into his heart, and exhibit themselves in his practice. He sees so much of the body of the great truths and fundamental points of religion, that he has a satisfactory trust in those lesser branches which ramify to infinity from the parent stock ; though he may not individually and completely comprehend them all. He is so powerfully convinced of the general truth, and so deeply impressed by the general spirit of the Gospel, that he is not startled by every little difficulty, he is not staggered by every "hard saying." Those depths of mystery which surpass his understanding do not shake his faith, and this, not because he is credulous, and given to take things upon trust, but because, knowing that his foundations are right, he sees how one truth of scripture supports another like the bearings of a geometrical building ; because he sees the aspect one doctrine has upon another ; because he sees the consistency of each with the rest, and the place, order, and relation

of all. The real Christian by no means rejects reason from his religion; so far from it, he most carefully exercises it in furnishing his mind with all the proofs and evidences of its truth. But he does not stop here. Christianity furnishes him with a living principle of action, with the vital influences of the holy spirit, which, while it enlightens his faculties, rectifies his will, turns his knowledge into practice, sanctifies his heart, changes his habits, and proves, that when faithfully received, the word of truth “ is life indeed, and is spirit “ indeed !”

THE END.











